University of Alberta

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S KNOWLEDGE:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

by

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

My father

Michael Murphy

and in memory of my mother

Noreen Murphy

and my grandparents

Alene and Gordon Leslie

Marjorie and Hubert Murphy

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CHAPTER ONE

Beginning Thoughts

The context of being a reader

When I read I am drawn to works that weave in and out of the works of others. There is, in work like this, an honouring of the influence of others on one's own work. It provides a larger landscape in which to understand not only the words of the author, but some of the work that has shaped those thoughts. As I began my research into the experiences of children in school I was doing so considering my own and others' thoughts. As a teacher for many years I had long been interested in children. As a person I have been a reader since I was a child. I have memories of books my parents bought me and ones I eventually bought myself. Some of these books have disappeared into the world, misplaced, removed, or given away. Some magically have returned to me, partly out of luck and the need to excavate my mother's house once she had died. Many of them have found places in my classroom library where they may or may not be read. I draw the children's attention to those books I have possessed for a long time so they will see the value I place in reading and my long association with it.

It is no wonder then, in light of these two interests, that I was drawn to working with Jean Clandinin in 1997. Years before meeting Jean I ran into a colleague who told me of a class she had taken where she had done a lot of writing. When I asked her years later who taught this class she told me it was Jean. Working with Jean made a lot of sense to me. She was a woman who saw the value in people's stories, honoured their practical knowledge, and worked at understanding their experience.

As a beginning graduate student I often wondered where people's ideas for graduate research came from. All of my ideas seemed to be piggybacked on the ideas of others. I came to accept this was how I would progress in my work. When I began to write my proposal I played with the idea of understanding the peace candle gathering in my classroom as a place of curriculum making. The peace candle was not my idea; I borrowed it from colleagues. As the children and I worked together in this space I wondered about what they were telling me. As a moment in our classroom it was full of energy, interest and, at times, intensity. I saw it as a place where the children had more control over their lives in school. It became a favourite time of day for them, one they could ask for and during which they could direct the agenda for the conversation. It made sense to me to explore this in my research. I had already talked with other people about it as a space and was sure this was my research topic. With this thought in mind I began the work of writing the proposal. However, other thoughts kept creeping in that had little to do with the idea of a peace candle gathering as a space for curriculum making. Indeed, what I was more interested in, I discovered as I wrote, was what the children were telling me in the space.

It was at this point that Jean told me I had to choose what I was going to study. I was taken aback by this turn of events. I had not realised I was talking about two different things. Jean, however, assured me that I was and, trusting her judgement, I saw I did have to make a choice. What to choose, however, became the question. Would I choose what I had imagined would be my work all along or would I go with what seemed to be emerging out of my interest? I decided upon the latter because it interested me the most and seemed more of my own. It was what had always interested me about the children I worked with in school. I was interested in how they saw things. I was interested in how they saw their lives at school, the work and the people with whom they associated. I was interested in how they made sense of what happened to them at school. Wondering about this I used Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) idea of the professional knowledge landscape as a beginning place to think about the knowledge landscape of children. Needing a way into understanding what might shape this landscape I fractured Polanyi's (1962) concept of personal knowledge into five kinds: relational, narrative, embodied, practical, and nested knowledge. However, as I undertook the research I came to see these kinds of knowledge could only be studied in relation to each other and trying to understand them individually was, in some ways, a false construct, but one that worked in many ways. The poem by Zolynas (1996) helps me think about the idea of fracturing knowledge.

Love in the classroom
-for all my students

Afternoon. Across the garden, in the Green Hall,
someone begins playing the old piano—
a spontaneous piece, amateurish and alive,
full of a simple, joyful melody.
The music floats among us in the classroom.

I stand in front of my students
telling them about sentence fragments.
I ask them to find the ten fragments
in the twenty-one sentence paragraph on page forty-five.
They've come from all parts
of the world—Iran, Micronesia, Africa,
Japan, China, even Los Angeles—and they're still
eager to please me. It's less than half
way through the quarter.

They bend over their books and begin.
Hamid's lips move as he follows
the tortuous labyrinth of English syntax.
Yoshie sits erect, perfect in her pale make-up,
legs crossed, quick pulse minutely
jerking her right foot. Tony,
from an island in the South Pacific,
sprawls limp and relaxed in his desk.

The melody floats around and through us
in the room, broken here and there, fragmented
re-started. It feels mideastern, but

it could be jazz, or the blues—it could be
anything from anywhere.
I sit down on my desk to wait,
and it hits me from nowhere—a sudden
sweet, almost painful love for my students.

"Never mind," I want to cry out.
"It doesn't matter about fragments.
Finding them or not. Everything's
a fragment and everything's not a fragment.
Listen to the music, how fragmented,
how whole, how we can't separate the music
from the sun falling on its knees on all the greenness,
from this movement, how this moment
contains all the fragments of yesterday
and everything we'll ever know of tomorrow!"

Instead, I keep a coward's silence.
The music stops abruptly;
they finish their work,
and we go through the right answers,
which is to say

> we separate the fragments from the whole. (pp. 193–194)

Personal knowledge

> Personal knowledge is an intellectual commitment, and as such inherently hazardous. Only affirmations that could be false can be said to convey objective knowledge of this kind. All affirmations published in this book are my own personal commitments; they claim this, and no more than this, for themselves. (Polanyi, 1962, p. viii)

So writes Polanyi in his 1962 preface to *Personal Knowledge* and I take it to heart. What I see before me in trying to understand my research is something I consider to be inherently hazardous, because in trying to understand the experiences of others I am doing so from an inherently personal perspective. I will be willingly drawn into their lives and, in the end, return to my own, trying to make sense of what I have learned.

These two movements, outward and inward, help me understand Polanyi's (1962) subsidiary and focal awareness. At times in the research field notes, I saw that while I thought my focal awareness was on the words of my participants I discovered, by what I said, that they had become my subsidiary awareness while the awareness of my own experience had moved to a focal position. I will see these moments later with chagrin, struck by my inability to put my own story on the back burner as we talk about school and personal stories. With increasing dread I see this repeated throughout the transcripts. However, I came to see this dialogue as a dance between the two of us. I wonder where the conversation might have gone if I had kept my mouth closed and been what I think of as a good listener, largely silent. However, I have long thought, as I listen to the children I teach try to tell their own stories in response to another's, that we make sense of a story by telling, or at least thinking, of our own, so in some moments I forgive myself this transgression. Polanyi describes this with reference to commitment, "The enactment of commitment consists in self-compulsion with universal intent through the interaction of two levels: a higher self, which claims to be more judicious, taking control over a less judicious lower self" (p. 318). While these two aspects of self may struggle for dominance as I learn in the research environment I am caught in my commitment to understand my participants, and subsidiarily, myself.

In referring to myself I imply that in this work I cannot be objective, but I hope to lessen my subjectivity by attending to empiricism. For Polanyi (1962), the "act of knowing includes an appraisal; and this personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge, bridges in doing so the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity" (p. 17). My attention to empiricism, my own experience, the research and thoughts of others is what contributes to this appraisal. It is, however, as I found as I attended to what I was writing in my proposal, based on my acknowledgement of "a beauty that exhilarates and a profundity that entrances" (p. 15).

I am exhilarated and entranced by the knowledge of children. As I watch young children enter school I am struck by how disorienting school can be to them. Some children recover from this disorientation, other children struggle with it, and some are silenced by it. Chamoiseau (1997) names this conversion of knowing as domestication:

> The days were to slip by like that, gradually domesticating the inkwells, the pens, and the exercise books, which were handed out every morning and handed in every afternoon. They never left the school. They became familiar to us, and with each passing day we would leave a trace of ourselves behind in them. (p. 58)

Understanding the knowledge of others is an illusive endeavour; it is represented by words, both oral and written, thoughts that are largely never spoken, in action and inaction, and in tacit ways, which are difficult to discern as an observer and often as difficult to name by the individual. This was my experience as I conducted the research. Understanding the knowledge of the children in the inquiry would be illusive at times and it was by layering the field notes that I was able to see what knowledges could be used to understand their experiences.

> For I know perfectly well how to do such things, though I know the particulars of what I know only in an instrumental manner and am focally ignorant of them; so that I may say that I know these matters even though I cannot tell clearly, or hardly at all, what it is that I know. (Polanyi, 1962, p. 88)

Polanyi (1962) uses his ability to find his coat or ride a bike as exemplars of what he means by tacit knowledge. He makes the distinction between not being able to tell how he rides a bike or finds his coat and being able to say he knows how to do both. In the inquiry I saw this use of tacit knowledge as my participants talked about their experiences in school. Often they were able to tell me what they knew about their experiences of school, but often they were stumped when it came to telling me how they knew. Such is the tacit knowledge of individuals. In my research I felt compelled to be able to explain the tacit knowledge of the participants, their experience of being able to make sense in school, but not know how they are making sense; otherwise, how am I to convince the reader that we might both learn something from my endeavour.

The influence of children's literature

As I sit in my friends' cabin in central Alberta I can see the road that runs in front of their place. Just now a young girl has walked by, on her own, reading as she walks. I want to run out and ask her the name of her book. I want to know because I want to know what book captivates her so strongly that she cannot put it down when she goes for a walk. I want to read it for myself. I want to tell her that I too have gone walking, reading as I do, because I cannot leave the world I have found behind. Amy, the daughter of this cabin, is also a reader. Over the years she has supplied me with many books, which I have, in turn, shared with others. Rippling away from her, in circles, are the others who have read the books she has read because she has shared them with me. Amy's books are ones I probably would not have found on my own and most of them are about the experiences of children. These books help me think about the lives of children as complex stories. These books, along with the conversations of friends, encourage me to see and stay with the tensions in storied lives.

In *Pictures of Hollis Woods* (Giff, 2002), given to me by Amy, the main character, Hollis, writes,

> Two of Izzy's candies filled my mouth as I went around the side of the house. I didn't mean to listen or to be sneaky. Ordinarily I did that a lot. I'd stand still in the hall to hear what the stucco woman had to say to her telephone friend. I'd flip pages on the teacher's desk to see what disaster of a mark I'd gotten in social studies or social attitude. I'd pass by classmates in the schoolyard to find out what they had to say about that kid Hollis Woods. (p. 68)

What do they say? What mark did she get? What do these things mean to Hollis? What do they make her think of school? The questions I have for Hollis are questions I have for the children with whom I work in school and in my research.

Understanding empiricism in a narrative inquiry

The Red Wheel Barrow

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens. (Williams, 1996, p. 66)

Why the poem? Simply this poem is about someone's experience of a red wheelbarrow. For someone this wheelbarrow is important. In fact, for that individual, much depends upon this wheelbarrow. We know the colour of the wheelbarrow, its location, and at the moment of seeing the wheelbarrow, the weather. This is a poem about experience, but it is layered experience. Is it the writer's experience of the poem, or does he have a certain knowledge of the wheelbarrow and how it figures in the life of its actual owner? In fact why write this poem at all? In many ways it is cloaked in ambiguity. We are left with the wonder of why so much depends upon it. For me this is the essential part of the poem. So much depends on this poem. So much depends on the experiences of children in school. In this inquiry so much depends on my experience of the research.

I have chosen this poem to think about what empiricism means to me as a narrative inquirer because empiricism is at the heart of this study. Without the collection of field notes, taped conversations, and student material that comprise this inquiry my work is not based on the experiences I had as a researcher working with my research participants. Rather, this inquiry becomes a conversation with myself about what I think is occurring in school.

This is important to me. It is important to me to think hard about why so much depends on the experiences of children in school rather than my experiences in school. It has been too long since I was a child to do any real recollection of my memories of life in elementary school. Rather I must depend upon the good grace of the children with whom I worked. I was fortunate, they were graceful.

Wonders about school

In 1971 I entered Grade 1 in rural Alberta. I was the eldest of my siblings and the first to go to school. Every morning I would catch the bus at the end of our driveway and travel the distance to school. I would leave my brothers, my mother and father behind and make the trip. I did not mind. I had wanted to go to school from the moment I first accompanied my grandmother to her Kindergarten classroom in the city. I have a clear memory of walking along beside her as we hurried to her Kindergarten in a place close enough to her home that we could walk.

As I now write I wonder what I imagined school would be like as that 5-year-old. Certainly experiences from my own and my grandmother's Kindergarten class shaped my imagining. Other ideas must have influenced me as well. The stories of other children, talk with my parents, conversations with my grandmother, and media in books and on TV must have all influenced my thoughts. As a small boy I must have wondered about school and, when I wondered, it must have made me excited enough to want to go.

Now, as I began to imagine this research I wondered again about school. Indeed, this wondering has never left me, only ebbed and flowed through my life in schools. When I first began to teach I wondered what school would mean for me as a new teacher. How would I make sense of a classroom in which I was responsible for some of the school experiences of children? Wondering has always been a part of my work as a teacher. I continue to wonder what kind of place is school. I wonder how children experience school. I wonder what stories children, teachers, and parents tell of school. These are interesting wonders for someone who has spent 33 years of his life in school of one form or another. I could perhaps speak of what stories I tell of this place called school, but I am curious about the stories others tell of school. I am curious about what kind of place school is in each child's story. How does school fit into each child's storied life?

CHAPTER TWO

Shifting from Teachers' Experiences of School to Children's Experiences of School

These questions lead me to wonder about how children think about school, what personal, practical, and narrative knowledge they construct or possess in order to understand their lives on the school landscape. Trying to understand students' knowledge of school will be central to this work. I do not come to this work without a beginning conceptual framework. I have been a part of research groups conceptualising school contexts as teachers experience them for several years now: Clandinin and Connelly's work on understanding diversity in schools, Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Whelan, and Murphy's inquiry into the experience of Aboriginal families in school, and my work with Holden into the experience of teachers working with new curriculum. So as I turn my attention from teachers' experiences to children's experiences of school contexts I draw on this work. I use the metaphor of a landscape in order to think about school in terms of space, place, and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly developed this metaphor as a way to give an account of teachers' experiences of school contexts. For them landscape "has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships" (p. 5).

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) drew on Dewey's work to conceptualise teachers' experiences. They drew on Dewey's (1938) ideas in reference to thinking about how experience is framed by the context of one's life. Dewey describes experience in this way:

> The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. … It means, once more, that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons. The conceptions of *situation* and of *interaction* are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation … The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. … Different situations succeed one another. But because of the principle of continuity something is carried over from the earlier to the later ones. (pp. 43–44)

Thinking about landscape and experience frames my wonder about knowledge and children in school. I draw on Dewey's (1938) conception of experience to try to understand children's experiences of school. I use the ideas of situation and interaction to frame my inquiry as I try to understand students' knowledge of school. Situation and interaction help me to understand the continuity and contexts of children's storied lives in school and, as the inquiry unfolded, I came to see how complex situations and interaction were in children's school experiences. How do children know school, or, within the context of this study, how do some children know school? What are some children's experiences of school contexts? What is their knowledge of the landscapes of schools? My research puzzle is about children's knowledge of school contexts, of school landscapes. Wondering about this leads me to my memories of Grade 1 in my school, the first school in my history and my experiences on this school's landscape.

Pirates' Hill

I began Grade 1 in Mrs. Z's class but was transferred to Mrs. K's class sometime early in the year. I recall riding down the hall in my desk on a trolley. If transferring classes meant you could travel like this I was all for the trip. I have vague memories of my time in Grade 1. At one point I sat in front of another student, Bradley, who kept a messy desk. He was fond of gluing Kleenex to the top of the inside of his desk and keeping his crayons in disarray. He also had a habit of colouring his lips with crayons. Initially Mrs. K's class was a regular four-sided classroom at the end of one of the halls. During the year at some point the new open area opened and all the Grade 1 classes moved into the space. Each class was side by each with blackboards on rollers separating them. In this space I have memories of playing indoors, running in the open space, and our desks in rows facing the board and away from the rest of the open area. I begin with this memory in order to locate myself in the context of a classroom, the people with whom I shared the space, and some relationships that shaped my early experiences that first year in school. In this memory there are elements of change and individuals who interested me. It would seem that initial memories of school indicate movement and fluidity, at least in location and people. More to the point I locate my thoughts in the experiences of me as a Grade 1 student and not the teacher because I am intrigued by the experiences of children at school. My wondering takes me back to a memory of Pirates Hill.

Behind our school was a huge hill. Huge enough that it remains so in my memory and, as proven in a recent visit home, large enough not to be reduced from an adult perspective. As a child in school I remembered this hill was named Pirates' Hill. Rising steeply up from the backside of the school we were allowed to play on the bottom edge of it. The rules allowed that we could play just into the trees but no farther. It was covered with poplar trees and spruce and scrub. Laced with trails you could ascend to the top by a variety of paths. We weren't allowed to climb to the top. It was out of bounds and out of sight, but one day a group of us did, looking for treasure because we knew, where there were pirates there was treasure.

It was long recess, that time after lunch when you seemed to be able to play forever. We climbed to the top; miraculously we were not detained by anyone. When we arrived at the top we armed ourselves with sticks. That autumn rabies was infecting animals and we were afraid of rabid rabbits, although as an adult I have a hard time imagining being attacked by a rabid rabbit. Nevertheless, I recall it as a very real possibility in our 5 and 6-year-old minds. Turning right at the top of the hill we followed the trail that wound along the crest of the hill. Eventually we came to the edge of the forest and a group of houses. We returned along the trail past our original starting point to the far southern edge of the forest where a newer housing development was beginning. At one point we all were startled by sounds in the bush. Imagining rabbits, we made brave with our sticks, but nothing materialised. Just before the southern tip of the trail we discovered a hole and here we decided was where the treasure had been buried. There were no recent signs of activity, but our treasure seemed to be gone. As well we had seen no traces of pirates. Of course it had not entered our minds that north central Alberta, far from the sea, was an unlikely spot in which to discover pirates, their effects, or their treasure. Dismayed at the lack of imagined reward we turned back to school. We scrambled down the hill roughly at the point we had ascended and emerged from the trees at the bottom. There in front of us, standing outside the doors of the school in a half circle, were our teachers and principal. We knew we were in trouble. Heads down we listened to them as we were told that it was against the school rules to leave the school bounds (what were bounds anyway?) and that the top of the hill was definitely out of school bounds. I recall walking past them, my head down as we made for the coatroom. I have a vivid memory of legs as I walked past, women's legs disappearing into dresses. My vision seems to halt at their waists. I have no memory of the rest of their bodies, only of their legs, the edge of dresses, and the dress. Shoes must have been a part of these outfits and I'm sure their hands were firmly planted on their hips, but of these my memory fails. I also recall no aftermath. No punishments seem to exist in my memory. No detentions or lectures from my parents who had always told me if I got into trouble at school expect more of the same once I returned home. Around the whole memory I can only recall muted voices of children as we negotiated our journey along the top of the hill, the brief lecture about school bounds, and then silence, and, of course, their legs.

I am struck by this memory because in it there must have been so much more. What or who had influenced this group of children to climb to the top of the hill? How many of us were there? What sense were we making of the space at the top of the hill? Could we look down and see the school below us? Did the sounds of other children playing below us reach our ears at the top? What did the teachers make of us? Were we really late for school? Had they been looking for us? Was there any follow-up? Did my parents say anything to me about my midday adventure? Did I ever leave the school grounds again? What did I know of *bounds* for school places? How did I learn this? Was I ever out of bounds again that year? Did the group of us gather to tell our story and imagine what had happened to the treasure at the top of the hill?

So I begin to puzzle about student knowledge. How do students know what they know about school? What knowledge do they use as they move in and across the landscape of schools? I wonder how I will understand this knowledge and what it will teach me? Because I draw on the work of Clandinin and Connelly who say teachers live storied lives on storied landscapes, I begin by imagining that children too live storied lives on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I carry a story forward from 1969, a story that shaped some of my knowledge of school. In that story I moved on the landscape of school. I interacted with place, people, and things. I also acted on my imagination. I imagined treasure and rabid rabbits, built upon stories I had heard from other children and the warnings of my parents. I lived a story at the same time as I made one up, building new knowledge on old knowledge and when I came down I learned some more about school and boundaries and authority. I have questions for the boy I was, questions that cannot be answered because of who I am now and the ways the answers in my memory would be shaped by who I have become as an adult and teacher.

Who is the researcher?

Being a researcher in schools

My story of Pirates' Hill is a memory from my first year in school. It is also a place behind the school I attended for six years. I do not know what the adults in town called the hill, if they gave it any name at all. Perhaps by now enough of us have gone through the school for the hill to be referred to as Pirates' Hill. In this sense landscape becomes fiction. A hill behind the school is named based on a whim, a fantasy, its actual name unknown to many children who entertain the idea that once there were pirates in a northern Alberta town. Why else the name? The name Pirates' Hill is as good a name as any other and I cannot think of a better name for a large looming hill behind a school. As I recall this story and write it down I construct or piece together a memory and I create a fiction or a fictionalised text. This story is like any text, which according to Banks (1998) cannot be "free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror to the actual" (p. 13). Did my friends and I actually go to the top of the hill? Were we afraid of rabbits? Were the Grade 1 teachers waiting for us at the bottom of the hill? In my recollection the answer to all these questions is yes. Writing this story is a starting place for me to consider who I am as a researcher and the methodology I will employ as I begin research in school. Who will I be as a researcher? What stories will I compose of myself and what stories will I embody in the classroom? Being conscious of these wonders and questions will influence the ways I am attentive as a researcher.

I would like to think of my work as a researcher as a journey up Pirates' Hill. In the actions of a 6-year-old I see myself as a researcher. We climbed the hill with no intent behind our actions but to see what treasure could be found at the top. We had no plan and we had no map. Perhaps a foolhardy endeavour when looking for treasure, but when part of the adventure is the climb and the thrill of rabid rabbits, treasure becomes secondary. It is important to note that this is a story not of one boy climbing alone, but of a group of children. In much the same way my work as a researcher is not about one man going into a classroom. Rather I am part of a community of researchers. This community is comprised of the people whose research I build upon, the people who laid a foundation for my thoughts, people who have sat in classrooms before, people who have wrestled with their thoughts in order to illustrate an idea, and then wrote about it. Too, I am a part of a present community. Other researchers will be in the same school and we will help each other make sense of what we learn. I also have the good fortune to be a part of a community that sits together to talk about ideas and wonders. These are the people outside of my research setting.

There is another community, however, that I will also travel with as I work. This community consists of the people in the classroom, the teacher, students, parents, and other staff. Relationship is key in my work as a narrative inquirer, which, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "is at the heart of thinking narratively. For "[n]arrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally" (p. 189). Beginning to imagine the work of research I begin to wonder about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the people of a classroom. What do these relationships look like? How do they get negotiated between the researcher and teacher? Apple makes the comment in the introduction to Carspecken's *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research* (1996), "Michelle Fine (1994) argues that all researchers are agents 'in the flesh and collective.' Whether wittingly or not, they make choices among sets of political and epistemological stances that are both constraining and subject to intense debate and controversy" (p. x). This statement challenges me to consider that which would define my political and epistemological stances drawing on my narratives of experience as a teacher, teacher researcher, and researcher who has read the work of other researchers. So I will make an attempt. Ideally I consider classrooms to be shared spaces that are negotiated between teachers, students, parents, and other school personnel (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1999; Greene, 1986; Huber, 1999; Oyler, 1996; Paley, 1997). I believe relationship is key to understanding the lives of teachers and children in schools (Clandinin, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1994; Paley, 1986). I also understand schools and classrooms to be politically active sites with vested interest from many sources (Ayers & Miller, 1998; Doll, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997; Greene, 1995; hooks, 1994; Kliewer, 1998). Let me consider Pirates' Hill again. A group of children went up the hill— I remember a group; teachers and administration were waiting for them at the bottom of the hill—I remember authority and power, I also remember the power of the group of children deciding they could discover something; we were greeted with stern warnings and then silence—meaning I remember nothing being talked about or negotiated, there were rules and they were to be followed. All of these things are recalled through my memory and now filtered through my political understandings of school. Perhaps the very idea of my memory is completely reconstructed on what my filters or stances will allow (Zinsser, 1987).

I illustrate this point in order to make clear that the research I conduct flows from these places as well and what I see and recall and write will be influenced by them. I do not presume to be able to remove myself from the idea of who I am in the world in order to do my research. This is one of the reasons I have chosen narrative inquiry. In narrative inquiry the identity of the researcher is an integral part of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I will always be a small boy climbing a big hill and descending to find I have been out of bounds. I will always be a teacher being a researcher. I will always be a watcher.

A boy of the slough

There is a place not far from the farm where I grew up. As children we were not allowed to play there at anytime but for the winter. During the winter the slough was our skating rink and, because of the nature of solid ice, not a threat. The summer was a different time altogether. Murky pools and soft mud were places of treachery for small boys and hence my mother's warnings about staying away from the slough.

A story that was part of the slough was that of a draft horse who broke free of his stall and ran into the slough. Due to his size he was quickly mired in the mud where he sank until he drowned. This story I am sure was meant to scare us off the place; for me it had rather the opposite effect. When I was about 11 I wandered down to the slough. I would like to imagine I snuck into this space, but chances are because of its distance from the house there was no subterfuge needed to hide my transgression. Once in the slough I discovered a place of beauty and wonder. There certainly were murky pools but they opened in front of me like jewels in the tall grass and willow trees. To get to the slough you had to descend a small hill and then walk through some willows. It was a magical place for a young boy. It was private, there was much to see, and there was the added bonus for me of being out of bounds. I decided to push this even further by getting into the water. I slipped off my clothes and, grasping the bottoms of some willows, I slid over the edge of one pool and descended into the water. It was indeed murky, so much so that I could not see the bottom of my legs. I hung there, holding tightly to the willow, until I could stand it no longer, sure that something would rise out of the water to hold me there forever. Finally my fear and imagination became too powerful and I scrambled back onto the land. Panting from the exertion of staying my imagination long enough to be in the water I lay in the grass. Lying there in the grass I fell in love with a place and when I dressed and left, a piece of me remained *behind. While exploring this idea in previous writing I came to name this presence Sloughboy. As I went home with my secret knowledge I left Sloughboy behind, not realizing he would come to be a continued presence in my life.*

I introduce the idea of Sloughboy in order to help myself understand some parts of the puzzle of Pirate's Hill and of myself as a researcher. There is always a struggle within to be part of a community while also to be drawn to those places out of bounds; to the otherness of others that I see within myself in the persona of Sloughboy. I endeavour to write through the eyes of Sloughboy throughout the dissertation in order to obtain insight. Once again I try to show themes of transgression. I try to be attentive to the political in boundaries and in my understanding of school, and always to keep the idea of place, of landscape, present.

Understanding the Contexts of School

In Clandinin and Connelly's work, the professional knowledge landscape is a metaphor employed to understand the structures and influences that shape school. In this passage Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe their meaning of the professional knowledge landscape:

> The landscape metaphor is particularly well suited to our purpose. It allows us to talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a

> landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and moral landscape. (p. 5)

As I noted in my introduction I am interested in how students make sense of and are shaped by their school contexts, their landscapes. I want to use the metaphor of a landscape as well to explore what students' landscapes might be described as comprising. Certainly student landscapes differ from the landscapes of teachers. The landscape is a matrix of people, places, and things, but the people, places, and things have different meanings in the stories of children compared to the stories of teachers. For example, the authority of adults shapes the school landscapes of children in a different way than it shapes the landscape of other adults at school. Children in turn shape the school landscape for each other and the adults who live alongside them. Using Clandinin and Connelly's ideas of the relationships between people, places, and things influencing teachers' professional knowledge landscape makes me wonder how these relationships influence the landscape of children in school. How do the people, places, and things of the school landscape shape children's knowledge in school? Dewey (1938) speaks of the temporality of situations, how they exist on a continuum, each influencing the other. What role does a child's history in school have in shaping his or her knowledge on the landscape? Chamoiseau (1997), in his memoir of school, says this about temporality and memory:

> The first day of school has shrivelled up into emotions themselves confused with those of subsequent first days, from year to year, in classrooms on ever-higher floors in the big old building. First grade Teacher, you will embody all your colleagues. Men cut from the same cloth. And that first class already contained within itself the pattern for those that followed. (p. 39)

Thinking back to my research puzzle and the lives of children alongside adults in schools makes the work of Chamoiseau important. The lecture I recollect receiving about climbing the hill in first grade shaped my knowledge of school. Now as an adult male teacher I wonder how the children's stories of me shape their stories of school landscapes. It is important to me because I care what children think about in relation to school. I care about the stories they possess of school and how these stories shape their lives in school.

Children enter into a landscape already shaped by other influences not their own and also shape it inhabiting a knowledge landscape of their own making. I entered Grade 1 unaware of boundaries at school. Children did not make the rule about boundaries but were expected to abide by it. I wonder how the experience of Pirates' Hill shaped my knowledge as a first grade student beyond knowing that the hill was now out of bounds. The objective conditions (Dewey, 1938) of the school landscape are these influences. Dewey, in his discussion of experience, takes into account the objective and internal conditions that mediate experience. The interplay between the two is what would shape a knowledge landscape for children. How did the objective conditions shape my experience that day and on subsequent days in school? Like Chamoiseau, what patterns were laid down for me?

School contexts as storied contexts

Teachers inhabit a professional knowledge landscape shaped by the presence of sacred stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Crites, 1971). Clandinin and Connelly talk about other kinds of stories that fill the landscape and shape the lives of teachers. They write of secret, sacred, and cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly). Secret stories are the stories of the classroom. Classrooms are typically safe places "where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These stories are essentially secret stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 25). Cover stories are the stories we live and tell on the out-of-classroom place that may align us more closely "within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 25). Sacred stories are ones with a plotline that theory drives practice, that practice is applied theory and are "shared by practitioners, policy makers, and theoreticians" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 25). Now I wonder about children's knowledge landscapes. Are there secret, sacred, and cover stories on their knowledge landscapes? What are the secret, sacred, and cover stories that children know and tell and how might they shape their knowledge of their lives in school? As a teacher I have long been aware of the stories to live by that children experience at school (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Their stories to live by are shaped by their knowledge and the knowledge of others. How might these landscape stories shape stories to live by for children in school? Connelly and Clandinin (1999) offer this explanation of stories to live by:

> Stories to live by [is] … used to refer to identity, [and] is given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context. Stories to live by are shaped by such matters as secret teaching stories, sacred stories of schooling, and teachers' cover stories. (p. 4)

Connelly and Clandinin use this idea of stories to understand the stories of teachers, where I am interested in understanding children as living on a storied landscape where their stories are shaped and shape stories to live by. Stories to live by is an important way I understand the experience of children and suggests a narrative understanding of experience (Bruner, 1991; Coles, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Crites, 1971). Individuals tell a story of their experience in order to make sense of the experience, and I am curious about how children story their experience in school and the ways they have of explaining this experience. This is where the idea of knowledge enters into their stories to live by. How do they use the different kinds of knowledge to explain their stories to live by in school?

Thinking about schools as landscapes is a way of thinking about how children make sense of school and understand it in their lives. It is a way of thinking about what children are attentive to at school and the ways their stories to live by are shaped and shape. My research puzzle is about children's knowledge of school contexts and school landscapes.

When I talk about school, children are characters in my story to live by in school. These stories may take the form of anecdotes recounted for the delight in a story, they may be ways of talking about my life as a teacher professionally and personally, and certainly they are ways of conducting professional conversations around policy and school decisions. Children are characters because they are talked about and exist in my stories by my control, through my decisions.

Who am I however in their stories? Just as they exist in mine, I exist in theirs. Chamoiseau gave me an idea of this as he recounts his experiences of school. He tells stories of his teachers and the other children at school. He locates himself in the classroom, on the playground, on the way to or from school and at home. All of these settings influence his telling of school. They are however, the memories of an adult recalling his childhood and school. How would they be different if they had been somehow captured while he was experiencing them? In comparison would they be the same experiences? Teachers are an important part of Chamoiseau's memories of school. They are an objective condition to the experiences of children in school. Chamoiseau's tale is the tale of a child in school. My story of Pirates' Hill is a story of school. Both of them are the stories of adults recollecting their days in school. Children living in the present context of school tell stories of their experiences. If I listen to the stories of children in school do I learn something about their landscapes? Will I learn something of their narrative knowledge of the landscape?

Returning to the teachers' professional knowledge landscape

In-classroom places and out-of-classroom places (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) are both part of the professional knowledge landscape of teachers. These are different moral and epistemological places. The in-classroom space is a space shaped by practice and narrative knowledge. Epistemologically this is different from the out-of-classroom place, which is a place of theoretical knowledge disassociated from the lived experience of the individuals in it. Whereas the in-classroom space can be seen as a place where theory and practice interact based on lived experience, the out-of-classroom space can be seen as lacking the relationship between the two mediated by lived experience. In this I see relationship as key. This theoretical knowledge can be seen to be arriving via a conduit (Clandinin & Connelly) and is not shaped by the individuals who must attend to it. Because the in-classroom place is a place shaped by the "relationships among people, places, and things" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 5) it is a moral space. The out-of-classroom place, shaped as it is by theoretical knowledge, is less grounded in the lived experiences of people and therefore more depersonalized. Living in these two places for teachers means crossing borders in and out of places that are more or less safe. I wonder if children experience them as different, as more or less safe places.

In my experience of living alongside children they seem to experience these places differently, but this remains a wonder. Are they two distinct places on the student knowledge landscape of children? I wonder how children would describe in- and out-of-classroom spaces due to their different experiences of them. Indeed, it is possible to imagine that what is an out-of-classroom space for a teacher may be an in-classroom space for a child just as in-classroom spaces for teachers may be spaces for children to be cautious in. What do these spaces look like for students? Can we use them to describe spaces for children at school or are they different in complex and subtle ways from the ways teachers experience them? Thinking about out-of-classroom places I return to Pirates' Hill to try to understand something more about student knowledge landscapes.

As a young child it made sense to us to climb Pirates' Hill. We wanted to know what was at the top. We didn't ask permission, perhaps we knew we would be denied, or perhaps, because we had limited experience with school contexts we thought it would be fine to climb to the top of the hill. When we returned teachers were waiting for us. Something in our interaction with them taught us it was not acceptable to leave the school grounds. I wonder what might have possibly shaped a new student's knowledge of school boundaries. I had grown up on a farm. I spent a lot of my time in the forest around our home and fields. The knowledge I had about forests was that they were places in which to play and explore. However, at school the forest was out of bounds. No fence marked this boundary, only the edge of the forest itself. My interaction with the teachers made me aware of the bounded space of school. My new knowledge, based on my experience at the bottom of the hill, shaped my knowing of school. This new knowledge was about the spaces in school. I wonder now if it started a new way of thinking about permission and space. Questions I can only wonder about now in the context of who I was as a small boy. Questions I can ask other children, but never myself.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: A Narrative Inquiry

This study is a narrative inquiry, which is a methodology that makes particular sense to me and resonates with my story to live by. It is the study of experience and is both phenomena and method suggesting the experience under study is narratively constructed and understood. Because of its collaborative nature and the way it occurs within the context of the lived story of the participants and the researcher it made sense in terms of how I understand myself in relation to the world. Another dimension of narrative inquiry is context and attending to this context for both the participants and myself as a researcher helped me situate myself in the experience of the inquiry making sense alongside my participants in the field. Therefore, narrative inquiry can be understood as taking place in the midst of lives, in the midst of particular contexts and is bound by this living out of experience. It bears considering that the lived stories of the members of the inquiry were already in play when I entered into the inquiry and would continue once the inquiry was finished bounding this understanding of experience temporally and experientially as part of larger stories to live by.

Part of my work as a narrative inquirer is to describe how the lives of the participants and myself are understood within this temporal space and to create narratives about them that help me understand my research puzzle. This, again, is an example of how phenomena and method can be experienced in a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry allows me to understand experience in a narrative manner (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Children and teachers in schools live storied lives. Children and teachers tell stories. They tell stories in order to explain experiences and to understand. In this inquiry the children and teacher with whom I worked told me many stories. As a researcher I had many stories; stories I shared and stories that shaped my understanding of the research in relationship with the children and their teacher.

A term used for thinking about attending to the lives of others as a researcher is the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The metaphorical three dimensional inquiry space is defined by "temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (p. 50). Using these dimensions helped me to understand the work of the study and myself as a researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) write about the dimensions of temporality and the personal and social as having four directions for inquiry:

> ...*inward* and *outward*, *backward* and *forward*. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions and so on. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment... By backward and forward, we refer to temporality–past, present, future. To experience an experience is to simultaneously experience it in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. (p. 158)

Later, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to the dimension of place as that "which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (p. 51). Utilizing these dimensions by attending to them allows for the inner space created in this metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space to be a space for the interaction of the three, for my interpretations and wonders. Living in this three-dimensional inquiry space allowed me to stand alongside the children for a year and attend to their experiences, their teacher's, and my own. Living alongside them allowed me to attend to their experiential knowledge as lived.

This year-long inquiry took place in a Kindergarten to Grade 6 elementary school called Ravine Elementary which is located in an urban setting in a western Canadian city. Some of the children in the inquiry had attended Ravine Elementary[1] since Kindergarten while others had moved to the school at some point during their school years. The children in the inquiry — Catrina, Leo, Erica, Cheyenne, and Travis — were students in Lian Elliot's Grade 5/6 classroom. Lian began her teaching career in the school and had worked in the past with all of the children in the inquiry, except for Catrina, for at least one year or longer. I had met Lian at the end of the preceding school year to negotiate the inquiry and had the opportunity to meet some of the children before the formal inquiry began.

By attending to moments in the storied lives of these children I began to do the work of understanding. This attending entailed observing them in a variety of situations at school, talking with them, tape recording conversations with them singularly or in groups, listening to them talk in class meetings, and audio recording these meetings or gatherings. I also talked to parents and other staff members to add detail to my work with the children.

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[1] Ravine Elementary school is a suburban school in a western Canadian city. The neighbourhood as reported by Statistics Canada (1996) is ethnically diverse with the largest ethnic population represented by individuals of European descent followed by individuals of South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Filipino and Latin American descent in order of percentage of the community population, with other ethnicities represented. A small percentage of people in the community are of Aboriginal heritage. It is a middle to lower middle class neighbourhood comprised of mostly single family dwellings. The immediate area surrounding Ravine has a number of multiple family dwellings including rental apartments and townhouses as well as some housing owned by aboriginal groups. It has many green spaces located adjacent to schools and separate city parks. It is a family community with children 19 years or younger making up 42 % of the community population with an employment rate of 72%.

Doing the work of a narrative inquirer in the three-dimensional inquiry space highlights my relational role in the inquiry. Temporally it moves me backwards and forwards in time. I attended to the small boy climbing Pirates' Hill and how his knowledge of school was shaped just as I attended to the lives of the children, teacher, parents, and myself in the inquiry. I attended to the places of the inquiry composing field texts that illustrate the physical locations. Living in the three-dimensional inquiry space positions me in the inquiry and made me attend to my position while at the same time attending to the participants with whom I worked.

Living in the field

Children live alongside adults in schools. The decisions of the adults often have a direct influence on the children at school, it shapes their lives at school and subsequently shapes the ways of knowing they have about school. This knowing has a works-in-progress quality to it, knowing-in-progress so to speak. This knowing-in-progress is a personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1962) and specific to each child. Being able to understand the personal knowledge of children entailed listening to them and being attentive to how they described their lives at school, particularly in relation to each other, school staff, and the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The work of Paley (1986; 1997) helped me in this regard because of her work listening to and thinking about the voices and stories of children.

Being attentive to the stories and experiences children shared as we worked together presented the puzzle of understanding the lives of the children at school and capturing those experiences in narrative ways. Thinking about their stories and experiences helped me to describe how the children's knowledge was shaped in school. Essential in this for me as a teacher is the puzzle of how student knowledge is formed on the school landscape. My wonders about the knowledge students have of their lives in school contexts and the school landscape shaped the field texts that were generated and led to wonders during the research; wonders that I explored as I thought alongside the children and their teacher, Lian; wonders I wrestled with as I read the field texts and began the process of writing.

The places of school in this inquiry included the classroom, halls, gymnasium, music room, library, computer lab, office, and the small room where many of our conversations were recorded. I lived alongside the children in other places such as sporting events and other out of school activities. Also, because understanding teacher knowledge of the children is a part of this inquiry, I composed field texts with their teacher, Lian. I made field notes of the life of the classroom, audio recorded conversations with her, and talked with her about situations and the children in the class.

Because this was a narrative inquiry into children's experiences in school it was important to live alongside them within their school context. This allowed me the opportunity to interact with them in their classroom, other spaces in the school, on the playground and, for some, in places outside school. This allowed me to ask questions based on what I was seeing, to inquire into their responses and conversations in class, and talk with others who shared their lived experiences of school. Living alongside the children for a year in their classroom developed a shared story of experience and some of the stories to live by had intersecting plotlines. The five children with whom I worked more closely during the year entered into a research relationship with me within the contexts of school. This relationship incorporated me as a character in their plotline of school and facilitated the kinds of questions I wanted to ask and the kinds of documents I wanted them to generate. It allowed me to inquire from within each of the five children's context and frame my understanding relationally. I was able to layer my understanding by attending to the layered relationships and intersecting plotlines of the people within the classroom and larger school population.

One of the aspects of the inquiry I found myself attending to was my role in the classroom. I have a teaching background, but was conscious about not being a teacher this year. This year I was going to be a researcher, although I knew as I lived alongside Lian and the children I would be doing some teaching. As the year progressed I found myself actively staying out of a teaching role because of how I felt it shaped my relationship with the whole class and more specifically Erica, Travis, Catrina, Leo, and Cheyenne, the five children with whom I was working more closely.

As the year progressed I began to think more about the creation of research texts. At this point I had been working in the field for 10 months generating the field texts. I decided to create interim texts as a way of beginning to think about how the field texts would be represented in the final research texts. I took the interim texts I created back to the research participants in order to make sure my understanding and representation was respectful of them and accurate. Interestingly, this sharing generated further field texts. While I was still in the field I began to create research texts based on the field and interim texts. Some of these research texts I was able to share with the participants. There was a movement back and forth in the creation of the various texts which helped to deepen my understanding in the inquiry.

As I began to analyse the field texts I returned to the literature on narrative inquiry to find the methods for analysis. However, here the literature did not have what I was looking for. It was my hope that I would find a step-by-step approach to understanding the field texts I had collected. This approach was not evident. Rather it was suggested that the field texts be read and reread, coded narratively, and intersections of various plotlines be noted and marked. What I had been hoping for was something that would reduce the field texts to a conclusion of sorts, a way of saying now here is what I know. Instead, the literature told me to continue the work of living in relationship, but this time it implied I should live in relationship with the field texts.

Living in relationship with the field texts entailed staying with the texts when I could not see my way to understanding. However, the longer I spent with the texts the more I realized I was being challenged to stay with the complexity of the lives of the children and their teacher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This was hard work. It meant I could not privilege one individual over another, particularly hard sometimes when it came to not accepting the teacher's story as the most valid story. It meant sometimes not privileging my understanding over a child's. The relationship I had established with the children and teacher meant the respect I had for them in person needed to still exist as I did the work of creating the research texts.

I took the work back to the participants I was still in contact with to check that I was honouring them in the work. I was conscious, as I shared the work with them, of the places of tension in the writing, tensions that had arisen in our conversations together. These were tensions I did not want to smooth over as they added to the texture and depth of the writing. When I took the writing back to Leo we sat at his family's kitchen table. Throughout the inquiry Leo had talked of his family, his relationship with them was key to his understanding of self. When I read his piece to him his parents sat at the table with us and his brother lay on the couch around the corner. It would seem that their relationship extended to me through the work Leo and I had done together.

I also generated interim texts to facilitate my understanding of the field texts. Interim texts can take a variety of forms. In this inquiry they were fictionalised pieces based on the field texts. Some of these were written while I was still in the classroom working with the children. All of the five children, their teacher, and some of the parents heard or read these fictionalised texts. At one time I read a piece to the whole class to give them an example of what I was doing with all of the information I had collected. All of the individuals in the study who heard or read them concurred that my understanding resonated with theirs and they could see themselves in the pieces. Some of these interim texts became research texts. All of them helped me understand the field texts, but more importantly, and surprisingly, they helped me most in understanding my relationship with the participants and what it meant to be a narrative inquirer within this inquiry.

The creation of these fictionalised texts challenged me to think about what this meant as methodology in the inquiry. In the next section I explore this aspect of the inquiry in more depth. In the subsequent section I discuss the creation of found poetry by the children based on their report cards. Throughout the inquiry the children created a number of documents that became field texts. Some of these documents became field texts because they were important pieces created within the context of the curriculum of Lian's work with the children. Other documents were designed by Lian and me as part of the inquiry and, like the report cards, provided insight into particular aspects of the children's lives in school. These documents often provided me with another way of understanding the children, sometimes even shifting preconceived ideas about the nature of their knowledge in different school contexts.

Fictionalisation as a methodology

The transition from field to writing

Stepping back from working in the field can be accomplished by the shift from creating field texts to writing research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A transition between field texts and research texts can be the writing of interim texts. The field texts in the inquiry had a number of forms. This included field notes; poetry created by the children; fictionalised stories of themselves at school, class work, and journal entries; taped conversations with the participants; and a variety of artefacts generated by the school, teacher, and children. Interim texts can help begin the process of understanding the various field texts that have been generated in the field. When I began this transition I started by writing narrative sketches of the participants in my inquiry. My attempt at this, however, did not capture the life of the inquiry, nor what I saw as the character of the participants. The narrative sketches I was attempting to create were not helping me understand the field texts, nor were they moving me in the direction of creating research texts. Therefore, I needed to develop a different kind of interim text that helped me understand my experiences in the field and support the subsequent development of research texts.

To begin writing the narrative sketches I selected one of the participants, Travis, to work with first. I reread the transcripts of the conversations we had had to that point in the research. I read over the writing he had generated, looked at his work samples, and read through the field notes marking places where he was represented. My attempt to represent who he was and how I understood him in a narrative sketch seemed wooden and contrived. While it was based on the field texts it seemed to be missing the life blood of who he was and who he was in our relationship. Narrative inquiry as a methodology reflected the narrative ways I understood the experiences of individuals to be formed. I knew, as I began to create the interim sketches, that I was trying to capture a narrative sense of Travis in a manner that made him accessible to my research partners and other researchers with whom I was working alongside in the school. One of my research partners, Anne Murray-Orr, was writing wonderful narrative sketches that brought her participants to life. I wanted to write narrative sketches that did the same for my participants, namely at this point, Travis, a boy who seemed full of narrative understandings of the world. Unlike Anne, I was not successful in my writing.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that the form of our work can be shaped by how we make sense narratively in the world. They tell us that to guide our thinking we can look to the shelves of our bookcases to see what kinds of texts shape our reading. The shelves of my bookcase are filled with a large amount of fictional work. As I sat in my office at home I thought about how this might look in an academic endeavour. Could I use fiction to make sense of my field texts? In chapter two I wrote about my adventures on the hill behind my elementary school. While not wholly fiction, it was based on a memory of one lunch hour break in my first year of school. I relied on imagination to fill in the gaps in my recall of the moments on the hill. There was then an element of fiction in the creation of that text.

Sloughboy the fictional character

In Chapter Two I wrote a text about going to the slough, a marshy area, not far from the farm I grew up on in northern Alberta. This text introduced Sloughboy and starts as an autobiographical text and ends in a more fictional manner. I experienced some anxiety about the inclusion of this writing when I first shared my proposal writing because it did not fit into my understanding of academic writing. My committee liked the Sloughboy piece of the proposal and wondered if he would figure largely in the final work. My concern at the time, which I expressed to my committee, was that it would not represent the experiences of the participants, but rather my own. At this point in time Sloughboy was constrained by the world in which he lived, the world I shaped through my experience.

Sloughboy, as a character, was initially an offshoot of the boy I recollected myself as in the mid-1970s. He was a character who was generated in a piece of autobiographical writing I was doing early on in graduate school. Over time he has become something more than that boy, something of his own being. His main companion in the school is the skeleton of a great draft horse that broke lose from his place on our neighbour's farm and ran into the slough where he became trapped in the marshy land and drowned. Whether this story of the horse is true or was told to me to scare me out of the slough I do not know. In the Sloughboy writing he is resurrected as a companion to the boy and called Cravenbeast; this skeleton becomes the beast of knowledge upon whose back Sloughboy sometimes travels.

Part of the landscape of the slough is the grass. The grass, with its intricate root system, is, for the purposes of my writing, one entity. Its whispering stories are propelled by the wind and its secret stories are communicated through its extensive root system. Various other characters populate Sloughboy's world and help him make sense of his experiences.

These beings are Sloughboy's companions in the slough. Beyond the slough, bounding its edge, are the poplar. They are cousins to the grass in that they share a root system as well, and while not grass, function in much the same manner. Being trees, and not the pliable grass, their thoughts are much slower and often the recipients of ridicule on the part of grass. Beyond being Sloughboy's companions, these beings, along with Sloughboy, began to assist me as I played with ideas and explored thoughts in my life and reading.

Understanding the role of interim texts

In 2002 at an AERA pre-conference session on Constructing Field Texts Poems, one of the presenters, Mary Stewart, spoke about how she used found poetry as an interim text as a way to understand her field texts. These poems did not necessarily appear in the final work, but assisted her in analysing field texts and thinking about her research. Borrowing on this idea I began to think about using Sloughboy as a way of understanding what I was learning from my research participants and myself in the narrative inquiry.

Interim texts function not as drafts of research texts, but rather as something separate from both and, as I explained earlier when writing about living in the field, they are a way to begin the transition from field texts to the creation of research texts. Richardson (2001) uses the writing of personal stories to facilitate her understanding. Richardson helped me understand what I was trying to do when I wrote using Sloughboy— I was trying to get at my understanding of experience through the work of writing and in this, writing fiction, something different from rewriting field texts. Writing fictional interim texts allowed me to step back from field texts. This helped me see my research in a new way. I became intrigued by the ways the fictionalised pieces made me aware of elements in the field texts and research experience I do not think I would have recognized if I had not engaged in this writing process. I also became interested, as I created the fictionalised pieces, in the process of creating fiction in a research framework and what that meant in the process of moving from field texts to research texts. It became an exploration of moving in and out of worlds, the worlds of the children in the inquiry, the fictionalised world, and the world I inhabited as narrative inquirer.

Fictional worlds

The use of fictional worlds helped me attend to the lives and experiences of the children away from the landscape of the school. On the landscape of school the story of school is pervasive. It is the dominant story in which the participants live their lives. The story of school shapes the lives of people while they are in the place and space of school by what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) refer to as the sacred story of school. The mundane stories (Crites, 1971) of the experience of people also shape our individual stories of school because narrative knowledge is formed within the culture of the individual (Bruner, 1991). In schools these mundane stories or school stories would be the stories of other children, family members, teachers, other school employees, and indeed the stories of school told by the larger community.

How then was I to think about stories of school not locating myself in school, or not as teacher/researcher/one time child student? This is when I began to consider the idea of using Sloughboy and his slough world as a site for the creation of fictionalised interim texts. Eco (1994) writes, "fictional texts come to the aid of our metaphysical narrowmindedness" (p. 115). As an educator it is difficult for me to separate my story of school from the storied lives of my research participants. However, a fictional world provided me with the opportunity to visit ideas and explore relationships and field texts away from the strong story of school. This means to say in the slough I can see the children and possibly the teacher in a different manner. It challenges my narrowmindedness through the use of setting to imagine a sideways understanding of the field texts and therefore what I am learning from my participants.

Children, like teachers, are expected in many ways to follow a script of school. The script is enacted in many ways. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) talk about three kinds of stories that shape our lives at school. Two of these stories are secret and cover stories. Both of these can be lived in relation to the sacred story of school. These would be their stories to live by in school.

Connelly and Clandinin use secret, sacred, and cover stories to understand the stories of teachers. In this dissertation I use them to think about the kinds of stories children live by in schools. Therefore to remove the characters from the school setting and locate them in the slough allows me to think about their experiences in new ways. The slough in my fictionalised world is a place without school and contains its own stories.

The grass in the slough provided me with a way of thinking about the idea of the storied landscape used in the work of Clandinin and Connelly. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe school as a storied landscape in which teachers and children live storied lives. In my slough, the grasses are the living storied landscape upon which and in which Sloughboy stories his life. It borrows on the idea of "if these walls could talk" except in my place, the slough does indeed talk and the stories the grass tell can be heard in the whispering in the wind or by plunging one's hands into their roots and attending to their secret stories.

The landscape of Sloughboy

Sloughboy lives within the boundaries of the slough. He has no need to be anywhere else. In the slough he has all the companionship he needs and someday, when he needs to, he will travel beyond its boundaries. He has been joined in the slough by Cravenbeast, the skeletal remains of the great-drowned horse. Cravenbeast is also the beast of knowledge upon which Sloughboy can ride; indeed sometimes he sleeps curled within the rib cage of the mighty remains. They are constant companions. Sloughboy has also come to know the grass and its cousins, the poplars, who live beyond the slough. Grass lives connected to all other grass. Each blade may be separate in its identity, but the roots are one root and what one blade knows the others know. Sloughboy has but to submerge his hands in the roots of the grass to listen to their whispered conversations. They tell him of their cousins the poplar trees that he can see beyond the slough. In this way, by understanding what is close, he understands something of that which is not yet encountered. In the slough Sloughboy knows what he knows. There is no one to tell him what he knows is wrong. When he is puzzled Cravenbeast helps him. Sometimes he can ask the grass who may or may not decide to ask the poplars, grass is like that sometimes, truly it depends on the wind. Sometimes Sloughboy just sits and

wonders. In this moment he lets what he knows help him know something different. This is how a boy of the slough makes sense of his landscape.

'World'-travelling and fiction

In *The landscape of Sloughboy* my understanding of the metaphor of landscape in Sloughboy's world aids my understanding of the metaphor of landscape used to describe schools. When I wrote the Sloughboy stories in my proposal, (one is included in the first chapter of this dissertation) my intention was to open up ways of knowing through the interactions of Sloughboy. The Sloughboy pieces did not therefore begin as interim texts in this research; they did however help me think and know in different ways. This way of knowing relies on a more intuitive notion of knowledge. This intuitive way of thinking has elements of playfulness (Lugones, 1987) in it. It helped me step out of the narrowmindedness (Eco, 1994) I experienced when trying to write the narrative sketches. This playful way of figuring out helped me understand differently. Lugones might see this as a way of 'world'-travelling, although this 'world'-travelling involved travelling from my world to the fictional world of Sloughboy.

In writing these interim texts there is a "blurring of fiction and non-fiction [whose] results may be 'imperfect' from a traditional academic perspective, and it may not always be 'reassuring,' but it may open up not only new ways of reporting on a subject, but new ways of seeing that subject" (Banks, 1998, p. 175). The Sloughboy pieces, created as interim texts, draw heavily on the field texts and information from the children in the inquiry.

In the stories of Sloughboy and each of the children, the themes the pieces explore and some of the language used by the children is lifted directly from the field texts. I make this point to illustrate the influence of lived experience and research-generated field texts in the creation of these fictions. This sense of lived experience tries to explain the dynamic of living alongside the children in the field, sitting with the field texts and analysing them, and writing. All of these places were sites for the creation of understanding and influenced the fictional interim texts and my understanding. These stories were not written as final pieces of research texts, but as places of entry for me into the field texts. They were the beginnings of the work of making sense of the field texts I had collected.

To help me think about my work with Leo I created a Sloughboy story where Leo and Sloughboy meet. This story, which eventually became part of the final research text about Leo, is included in the chapter about him. It is based on a number of taped conversations, observation in class, and written work. I wrote this piece about Leo after I had written two other pieces, one about Travis and the other about Catrina. At this point the collection of field texts was continuing and it was the spring of the school year. My relationships with the research participants by this time were well established. While I was still writing these pieces to help me understand the field texts I was also at this point considering sharing them with the participants. Leo, the boy in this story, is a Native boy in Grade 6. He had attended Ravine School since Kindergarten. He is the youngest member of his family and is involved in a traditional dance society outside of school.

Thinking about Leo and Sloughboy

When I began to write the piece about Leo and Sloughboy I had no sense of how it would evolve. For example I did not begin the piece knowing that Leo would be named Boy-who-would-be-seen. Interestingly, when I shared this piece with his mother she was taken aback by the name he had been given. She recounted a story of speaking to an Elder about Leo:

> … she told me an elder had told her that Leo would be recognized this year (spring) and that he would be given a gift. She was taken aback when she saw that I had named him Boy-who-would-be-seen. She found this to be very significant. (note to file, March 6, 2003)

I share this example in order to further explore the connection between this piece of fiction and lived experience. When I began to work with Leo we often talked around his experiences of school. When I initiated conversation about school he was hesitant to speak and sometimes would become uncomfortable with some of the topics. Trying a different approach we talked about his life outside of school. Then he became animated as he talked about spending time in the woods camping and gathering plants. He talked openly about his involvement in the dance society, his grass dancing, and circle dancing. He talked about doing traditional arts and crafts. These elements are obvious in the fictionalised piece. What was less evident to me was my emotional engagement, which I had not captured in the field notes. I was surprised by the reference to woman-who-was-sick, the name Sloughboy uses for my mother.

The *Sloughboy and Leo* piece helped me think about Leo. It raised questions for me about his life outside of school and its relation to his experience at school. I wondered about the importance of his activities in the dance society and the work his mother is doing with him in order to help him learn more traditional ways. I was interested in what sideways looking meant to him. Experience was central in this narrative inquiry. I was trying to understand the experiences of my participants in the context of school. The piece showed me aspects of our research relationship and set within a narrative framework some of the experiences he shared with me. Sloughboy was providing me with a narrative structure (Carr, 1986) in order to understand Leo and my stories of experience. When I read the piece to him he was captured by the writing and immediately told me he had an idea of what both characters looked like as well as the slough. He informed me that he was going to draw both characters and the slough.

The idea of sideways looking, which has a quality of peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994), had first appeared in an earlier Sloughboy and children's piece called *Sloughboy and Travis*. In this piece, which was the first interim text I wrote, I introduced Sloughboy to Travis. Interestingly Travis, unlike Leo and eventually the other children, was not given a name in this piece. This idea of looking sideways presented itself in the work with Travis. When the classroom teacher, Lian, read the piece she commented "'Travis really does look out of the corner of his eyes in a sideways manner when he is watching something and trying to figure it out.' She seemed struck by this image of him and commented that I had really captured a sense of him and his sideways watching" (notes to file, March 3, 2003). Sideways watching became a way of thinking about the children who watched in a manner that protected them from direct involvement. For these two boys, Leo and Travis, it allowed them to watch without seeming to and, therefore, without drawing attention to themselves. I wondered at the beginning of my work with Leo if my direct gaze was what caused him discomfort and if my shift to conversation about life outside of school was a way of accommodating his reaction to my scrutiny.

The movement from interim text to interim text

I found, as I wrote the interim texts about the children and Sloughboy, that one interim text led to another. A world was being shaped in the slough populated by Sloughboy and the children. Elements of one interim text were appearing in another. In the following passage from the interim text *Sloughboy and Travis,* I think about sideways watching. It is interesting to think about why this kind of looking exists in the research. There is a quality of this in narrative inquiry and my understanding of it is shaped by Bateson's (1994) ideas on peripheral vision, the attending to the details that exist outside our focal awareness but demand our attention nevertheless. These details shape the contexts of our lives. In Travis, this attention seemed to be how he shaped his story to live by. Certainly all of us look sideways at a variety of people and things. It is a way of looking at something while not looking at it. With people it is a way of looking without being seen to look. Within my research I think about my presence in the children's lives and the topics of which we spoke. I have a sense that if someone was to engage me in a conversation around some of the ideas the children and I discussed, I too might look at them sideways before responding. As I worked with the children I had a sense of our vulnerability in the research relationship. As our relationships unfolded our vulnerability was shaped by our respect for each other and the trust we were building. It became apparent, as I learned what it meant to be a narrative inquirer, how essential relationship was for me in order to live alongside my participants.

[Sloughboy] looks sideways at Travis again. Sideways looking has always helped Sloughboy. Straight-ahead looking only shows him what he is wanting to look at ... sideways looking is ... well ... sideways looking.

Do you want to play hide and seek? Travis asks out of his silence and Sloughboy's wondering.

What is hide and seek?

Now it is Travis' turn to look at him sideways. Sloughboy sees this and wonders if Travis looks sideways for the same reasons he does. Sloughboy, doing his own sideways looking, sees Travis trying to figure out how to tell him.

One of us hides and the other comes to find him.[2]

This passage begins to open up the idea of sideways watching which is later explored in the texts of *Leo and Sloughboy* and in some of the other children's stories as well. It also leads the story into the game of hide and seek that Travis and Sloughboy play in the slough. It is the first time Sloughboy has played such a game. For me as a researcher, it was the first time I had entered into a research relationship with children in such an intimate one-to-one conversational manner. This begins to capture the sense of the unfolding nature of relationships and understanding in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry locates me within the experience of living alongside the research participants. The experiences of the children were what I was most interested in, and as the research unfolded, my experience became a part of this interest. In the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000),

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[2] The complete Travis and Sloughboy story can be found in the chapter about Travis. The story is called *Sloughboy and Travis*.

> Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect, narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. (p. 18)

The children and I were beginning to share our stories with each other. Some of the stories we were sharing were not easily shared. Take the distress of Leo when I pursued my conversation about his life in school. Leo and I were creating a shared narrative of experience. If a narrative unfolds over time it is shaped by time and experience or in the words of Dewey (1938) continuity and interaction. Relationship is always an unfolding dynamic.

I found in my work with Travis that he made me work for conversation more than the other children. He was quieter than the other children. When I reread our transcripts I noted that they were full of my questions and comments and his short replies. I saw in my responses that I was doing the work of making sense of what he was saying and that he would often either agree with my observations or shift me with a negative or noncommittal response. In fact, working with Travis' transcripts was very difficult. There were no places where he opened up into long descriptions the way the other participants did; rather, with Travis the meaning was constructed from reading entire conversations. Travis is a child, not unlike the others, brimming over with stories. However, his stories take more work to find, and when he tells them, to hear. By this I mean that sometimes he told me stories of his experiences that made me wish a small boy like Travis had other stories with which to describe his life. He made me attend to being a vulnerable observer (Behar, 1996). In the following piece of writing he is rabbit-twitchy, a phrase I use to capture a physical sense of feeling vulnerable, but often when he is talking in the research conversation I am rabbit-twitchy listening to him.

> *Then [Sloughboy] begins to look for Travis. Without the help of grass he cannot find him easily. He looks in clumps of willow. He walks to the edge of the slough. Where can Travis be he wonders? Then he thinks of Coyote following Rabbit. Coyote knows Rabbit is hard to catch, but catching Rabbit is more rewarding than catching Mouse. Sloughboy thinks about how Coyote acts when he seeks Rabbit and he decides that is how he will act to find Travis. He begins to crawl around the slough pretending to be Coyote. This is fun. Coyote will be surprised next time he sees Sloughboy and Sloughboy pretends to be him. Coyote will think this is a good joke and he will laugh with Sloughboy. Maybe Travis will laugh when he sees Sloughboy pretending to be Coyote. Maybe this is play, thinks Sloughboy. Out of the corner of his eye he sees, with his sideways seeing,*

something that is not slough. Like Coyote he goes still to see sideways better. There in the corner of his eye is the something. Slowly he turns to be able to see what he is looking at in a straight-ahead way. There is Travis. Sloughboy goes very still. Travis has not seen him. Travis is trying to make himself very small...so small. Sloughboy smiles. Travis knows how to hide. Sloughboy begins the almost ready to catch you dance he has seen Coyote dance many times. He quietly – oh so quietly – crawls to Travis' spot. He gets so close. Travis is rabbit-twitchy. He knows I am looking for him but he does not know where I am. Hide and seek is a both-ways game thinks Sloughboy. Travis is hiding but he is also at the same time seeking. Sloughboy watches Travis from close. Travis in his not looking has let Sloughboy get close. Sloughboy waits a moment like he has seen Coyote do ... Coyote always waits a moment. Sloughboy can feel excitement build in his body. He realizes this is fun ... this hide and seek both-ways game. He did not realize it had this part to it – this hiding and finding at the same time. Sloughboy is now hiding from Travis, but not for long and with that thought he pounces like Coyote pounces.

Travis yells.

The yell makes Sloughboy jump back and fall down.

The Travis yell makes Sloughboy yell.

Then in the silence after Travis starts to laugh and Sloughboy starts to laugh. They recognize each other. This laughter is a way of talking ~ just like it is a way of talking with Coyote. I like this play thinks Sloughboy.

You scared me.

You scared me back.

Now you go and hide.

And Sloughboy runs and jumps and twists and finds a rabbit-y place to hide in and pretends to be Rabbit who is hiding from Coyote and pretending to be Rabbit makes Sloughboy twitchy and wanting to be smaller so he curls up smaller. As he lies there curled up smaller he realizes that in this position he cannot seek Travis, but he does not want to. He wants to be scared again and so he lies there until, like before, the pounce of Travis makes him jump up yelling, only this time Travis does not yell back he just starts laughing.

One of the qualities of my relationship with Travis was the searching for his thoughts about the ideas we were discussing, a conversational hide and seek. In the transcripts there are many times when I shared a story of my boyhood to elicit a conversational response on his part. A comment that appears more than once in the transcripts is Travis telling me how we are "kind of the same." Another part of this research relationship was the laughing and sharing of humour. I used the idea of hide and seek to capture the sense of the seeking I did when we talked and the playful nature of the relationship. What surprised me was the hiding part of myself, the sense of vulnerability I experienced as I shared my own stories, the sense I had that in order for this relationship to be equal it would be just as important for me to share as it would be for Travis.

Playfulness was certainly a part of the research process with Travis and the other participants. It is playfulness in the sense of Lugones (1987) for whom play is the "attitude [which] involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the worlds we inhabit playfully" (p. 17). The sense of living and telling, or reconstructing of the research "world" was very much a part of writing the interim texts. Lugones' idea of attitude is a part of the creation of fiction tied to my field notes. The attitude includes attentiveness to the experience of others and my own as we move in and out of each other's world. For me it also involves the travelling necessary to go to Sloughboy's world. Sloughboy's world is one bound by his experiences; it is, according to Lugones one he inhabits and therefore I need to be as respectful of this place as I do of my research participants. This means I need to attend to the way Sloughboy's world is constructed and respect that construction.

Writing about Sloughboy

There is an ethical quality to the creation of these interim texts. Just as I cannot represent the research participants unethically, nor can I represent Sloughboy unethically. I wonder if I would be able to and, by this, I mean that I do not think I could force Sloughboy into a plotline not from his *world.* As a character, he exists within the boundaries of his identity just as I do. This concern about ethical treatment is all mixed with the need I bring to the writing, which is further understanding of field texts. Certainly, Sloughboy's world is a narrative place constrained by the plotlines he inhabits, the setting of the slough, and the temporality represented by the way his story is shaped progressively by the arrival of the various children from the inquiry. The children in the inquiry interact in certain ways with different people. There are individuals they would align themselves with and others they avoid. Writing about them is about knowing what is possible in representing their stories to live by. Creating fictionalised texts takes this knowing into account as I work with/in the world of Sloughboy. Sloughboy's world is a storied landscape I know. Bringing the children to that fictional landscape I see who they are, I see where they help me see their landscapes. There are some things that are possible in this world and others that are not.

Understanding a fictional world

As the work of writing fictionalised accounts about the children progressed, I became intrigued with the idea of writing a Sloughboy piece about the teacher. I wrote the piece, but it was not an easy piece to write. It felt stilted and contrived. The writing process had no flow to it or ease of movement. I wondered if this was only my response to the writing, but my research partners felt the same. It had a different tone to it compared to the pieces about the children. I had a sense throughout the writing that I was forcing Sloughboy into this relationship. It would seem that in the world of Sloughboy, adult authority figures did not make sense. In the teacher piece the story took place outside of the slough. Somehow it did not seem right to have an adult of authority in the slough. The conversation between the teacher and Sloughboy had a forced feel to it. While writing the teacher piece my sense was that they should not be meeting like this, but rather through the children. Perhaps she would be conjured through conversation or eventually brought to the slough by one of the children. A teacher did not fit in to the plotline of Sloughboy, or as I understood it, he would not interact with such an individual in his story to live by.

This leads to the idea of the slough itself as a character. This idea arose when Sloughboy and the teacher met outside the slough. Certainly in not locating the story in the slough I was respecting some need of the slough to be a place bound by conventions that did not at that time include this adult. In any of the pieces written about Sloughboy no adult has ever been in the slough, rather any encounter he has with adults takes place beyond the slough. When I wrote the teacher piece it seemed to break the narrative unity (Kerby, 1991) of the slough as a location and the character of Sloughboy. One could suggest that this reflects my experience as a child in the slough in that entering it I was ignoring the rules of my mother and acting on my own. I was choosing, as that young boy, to live a counter narrative to the one I had been living by staying out of the slough. It is possible for me to imagine that by going to the slough I was choosing a new story to live by in relation to parental authority and landscape. The slough I write about as opposed to the slough of my childhood has evolved into a place with its own conventions and life. It has become a particular landscape, one where Sloughboy lives and one I visit in my mind in order to help me make sense. Certainly the slough is a place like many places where what happens there can only happen there and nowhere else. It is the same as the classroom where I conduct my research. What happens in that space could not happen anywhere else. The teacher and children in that place enact a certain story on the landscape of the classroom. This makes the classroom, in the context of me as a researcher making sense of field texts that were created in the past, a storied landscape that is the recollection of stories from a place within a certain time. The opposite occurs in the storied landscape of the slough where the creation, the dwelling in the moment of construction of stories shapes its landscape. It is the temporality of recollection versus the present moment of creation. The shift with the Sloughboy pieces comes when they function as interim texts that I read and share with participants in order to make sense.

When I write using the slough I am surprised by what emerges in the writing. The emotional life of the work with the children becomes discernable in ways I had not previously considered. The games the children play in the slough such as hide and seek, and the narrative devices they use to tell of their experiences emerge from the writing and are not always stories that they tell in the research. Sometimes these games, these stories, these ways of being playful, are surprising to me. These surprises draw me into the gaps and silences in the field texts, gaps and silences made by the children or me. These surprises drew my attention to new ways of thinking about the field texts in a research voice, a way of representing my research in research texts. Attending in a fictionalised way helps me think about other worlds with particular attention paid to the experience of the children, but also to my experience as I made sense in a fictional world removed from the plotline of school. These interim texts facilitated a movement back and forth between field texts, interim texts, and research texts. This can best be represented by the field texts that emerged out of the sharing of the interim texts with the participants. This movement back and forth added layers to the research experience.

There was a sense in the creation of the interim texts, when they worked, of verisimilitude that was something more than aesthetics and operated at a different level. In the teacher piece of which I wrote earlier there was a sense of aesthetics, but the sense of verisimilitude was missing. A voice kept saying to me this would not happen, this could not be an event that would happen in the life of Sloughboy. I think of this in terms of imagining something inherently aesthetic but this object, placed out of its context, cannot belong in some places.

Levels of awareness

My focal awareness, while writing the Sloughboy pieces, was on the developing relationship between Sloughboy and the children. More specifically my focal awareness was on the children as individual agents rather than characters in the story of school. My subsidiary focus was on the field texts. This is important to note, because before writing, my focal awareness was on the field texts. This initial awareness was the foundation for the writing. I do not ascribe a hierarchy to these means of attending because both are important in different ways. Polanyi (1962) describes focal and subsidiary awareness as two kinds of awareness that are employed as skills in knowing.

> Subsidiary and focal awareness are mutually exclusive. If a pianist shifts his attention from the pieces he is playing to the observation of what he is doing with

> his fingers while playing it, he gets confused and may have to stop. This happens generally if we switch our focal attention to particulars of which we had previously been aware only in their subsidiary role.
>
> The kind of clumsiness which is due to the fact that focal attention is directed to the subsidiary elements of an action is commonly known as self-consciousness. A serious and sometimes incurable form of it is 'stage fright,' which seems to consist in the anxious riveting of one's attention to the next word—or note or gesture—that one has to find or remember. This destroys one's sense of the context which alone can smoothly evoke the proper sequence of words, notes, or gestures. Stage fright is eliminated and fluency recovered if we succeed in casting our mind forward and let it operate with a clear view to the comprehensive activity in which we are primarily interested. (p. 56)

What became clear to me as I wrote with my focal awareness on the construction of the text was the knowledge that existed and emerged through my subsidiary awareness of the field texts. When I had completed the fictionalised pieces and returned to them, with the gaze not only of author/reader but researcher, I began to see elements of my relationship and places of intersection with the field texts.

In the Leo and Sloughboy pieces actual phrases were taken from the transcripts of a conversation. The Leo piece progressed to a place where Leo was describing people on the school landscape, people who were strict and kind. As I arrived in the writing process at this place I returned to the transcripts to use his actual words. Could I have predicted I would come to this place in the writing? I do not think so; the purpose of that initial Leo piece was to begin to think about his way of being at school. His emotional reaction and my subsequent response was a way of attending to actual events in the research as in the passage, “He recognizes the ways of a sideways watcher and nods. And his eyes begin to make water. Sloughboy knows that from too much of being seen one can feel this way.”

In my initial conversation with Leo this occurred. While neither of us cried, Leo’s eyes did well up with tears which he rubbed away. I, on the other hand, became uncomfortable with the fact that I had made him feel this way with the direction the conversation I had been orchestrating had taken. In the piece I allude to this with an emotional response of my own. My relationship with the participants was already developed by the time we began the conversations, as attested to by this first Leo and Sloughboy piece, and only deepened as the year progressed. After these first pieces I became curious to see what further Sloughboy pieces could be created from the field texts. Indeed these interim texts were beneficial to the progress of the research and the relationships in it. Many of the fictionalised pieces became part of the final research text and are throughout the rest of this dissertation.

In the construction of these interim texts I am author, reader, Sloughboy, the boy on Pirates’ Hill, and I am also the vulnerable researcher trying to make sense within relationship. When I wrote them I thought of myself as the audience. I was aware that others might read the pieces. While I understood they supported the creation of research texts I did not at the time know whether they would appear in those texts, which were intended for a larger audience. As an author writing for a reader as intimately known as one may know oneself I can write with a singular purpose and then read with such a purpose in my mind. That purpose is the understanding of the work of the research. It is a further layer to lay alongside various field texts to help me in my work of understanding not only what I am hearing and seeing but also what I am learning about being a researcher in a narrative inquiry.

Report card poetry: A student created interim text

I have always been interested in found poetry as a poetic form. It interests me that a poet can take the work of another and, using their text, shape a new poetic text that may or may not reflect the original document. Annie Dillard has written a collection of poetry based on a variety of texts. In her author's note Dillard (1995) wrote, "[b]y entering a found text as a poem, the poet doubles its context. The original meaning remains intact, but now it swings between two poles. The poet adds, or at any rate increases, the element of delight. … It serves up whole texts, or uninterrupted fragments of texts" (p. ix). She then explains in her collection of found poetry she has shifted the meaning of the words and themes of the original texts. She does this by lifting pieces of text from the original work. She never adds a word, but she may drop them, or take them out of context. In this manner she changes what the original message might be.

In the fall of my work with Lian and the Grade 5/6 children I began to think more deeply about nested knowledge. I was interested in finding ways for the children to think about how their teacher knew them as people in school. In November the children at Ravine Elementary received their report cards. I was interested in knowing what was important to them in their report cards, but did not want to interview them separately or in groups. By this time of the year I had begun to work with the five children who were the focus of the inquiry. Interested in having a broader representation of the children in the class, I talked to Lian about the idea of using their report cards to have the children create found poetry. We decided to have the children use their reports cards as field texts for their found poems as a way to understand their experience of the report cards.

In order to understand the process of found poetry before we began to work with the report cards, Lian and I taught a lesson based on the book *An Angel for Solomon Singer* (Rylant, 1992). The children struggled to understand what they were asked to do and, on a subsequent day, Lian retaught the lesson using Patricia Polacco's book *Christmas Tapestry* (2002). These books were chosen for the rich images in them. *An Angel for Solomon Singer* was a book I was familiar with and Rylant's use of landscape and memory were particularly suited to what I wished to accomplish with the children. Lian's choice of *Christmas Tapestry* was influenced by a recent reading of the book to the senior assembly and Polacco's skill in the use of evocative language and the impending Christmas season. When Lian retaught the lesson with Polacco's book there was more success, and when I arrived that day the children had completed their own poems based on the folk and fairytales I had brought in from the library. The children had chosen books of interest to them. For some children I returned to the library to find other books that interested them and in some cases matched more appropriately their reading levels. The depth and quality of the poems varied greatly. In some, children wrote lines that did not seem to have any aesthetic quality. In others, powerful images were conjured by the words and phrases they chose.

Now that the children had a sense of what a found poem was we handed out copies of their report cards. We explained they were going to create found poetry using the text of their report cards in the same way they created poetry using the folk and fairytales from the library.

At Ravine Elementary the report cards do not have letter grades. These report cards use the phrases "work meets acceptable standard, work exceeds acceptable standard, work meets standard of excellence" with which to grade the children. Some of the children used these comments in their poems. Others translated these comments into letter grades and made this the focus of their found poems based on their report cards.

We did this activity in early December, two weeks after they had received and taken their report cards home. We repeated the activity again in March with their second report cards. In all of the students there was a shift in how they wrote the second poem. In all of the second poems the tone was more positive.

In this narrative inquiry these poems are field texts generated by the research participants, but they can also be considered interim texts based on another field text because they move understanding forward. The activity was introduced by me and then shaped by both the teacher and me. The children took their report cards and read through them. By this time they had taken them home and some of them had returned their copies to the school. After they read through the report cards they highlighted phrases that were important to them or resonated somehow. The focus of the activity was to create a poem that showed how they felt about their report cards while at the same time demonstrating what the report card was saying about them.

The poems that were created were diverse in form, structure, and content. The children found creating poetry based on the report cards more difficult than the creating poems based on the fairytales because the language was not as full of images. However, the poems they created were very successful in communicating how they saw themselves through the report cards. In some poems the children focused on positive comments, in others the focus was on areas for growth. In some the focus was on the grades they received. Some were positive and others focused more on what might be seen as negative comments. What was significant to me was how the children saw themselves in a situated way given the report cards were written by their teacher about them. The children had never before been given the opportunity to play with the words of their report cards and own them in a sense. I use the word situated to describe this because it suggests the layered nature of knowing, the back and forth movement that added texture to the work with the report cards. The work of writing the poems was also an intentional act that gave power back to the children in the form of being able to shape statements about themselves with someone else's words, in this case the teacher's words.

Working with the report cards

Before Lian wrote the report cards she gave them all a paper to fill in titled *Skills for School Success*. Lian's intent was to use these student-generated reflections to help her write the report cards. A careful examination shows the influence of the student writing in Lian's report cards. I have chosen Kerry to demonstrate this interconnection. In his skills for school success he writes that he is a learner and funny. He also writes, in response to a question about whether or not he is respectful, that he is — "Yes I'm [respectful] because I play with them and we both have fun" (student work, October 24, 2002). In his report card Lian reports that "He shows respect to classmates and teachers" (student report card, November 15, 2003). Throughout his skills for school success writing, Kerry talks about how he is distracted easily by other interests and children. In his response to the question "Do you stay on task? Do you stay focused?" he responds, "I stay on task most of the time. I get distracted reall[y] easy so I'm sometimes focused" (student work, October 24, 2003). In the report card Lian writes, "He tries his best to stay focused but finds it easy to get distracted" (student report card, November 15, 2003). Here is how Kerry constructed his poem. In it I saw how his poem is situated or layered within his skills for school success writing and the report card written about him.

Kerry

Able to jot down ideas, observations,
memories and reflection.
Easy to get distracted.
Compare experimental and theoretical
results.
Easy to get distracted.
Sharing ideas and cooperating while
Working.
Easy to get distracted.
Gather notes affectively.

Easy to get distracted.
Enjoyment of our cooperative
games and volleyball units.
Easy to get distracted.
Recognize, analyze and create abstract
works of art. (student work, December 2002)

In this first poem it is interesting that Kerry repeats the line "easy to get distracted" when all the other lines indicate a student with good skills who is doing well in all of his subjects. He is successful in his work and his relationships, but for Kerry the line that resonates the most is the one about distraction. I suggest that it resonates because of his reflection about being distracted sometimes in class. As an observer in the class I found that Kerry was, at times, distracted from his work. He did visit with other children, he did draw when he was supposed to be working on other projects, and sometimes, as I watched, he was obviously not paying attention. However, none of this was a significant part of how I knew Kerry within the context of the classroom. He was not unlike some of the other children in his level of distractibility.

What intrigued me most about this activity was the obvious nested nature of what was occurring. Kerry sees himself as a distracted individual within the context of being a student in a class. He writes twice in his skills for school success that he "goofs off" and that he listens "sometimes because I usually talk to Leo" (student work, October 24, 2003). This knowledge is reflective of knowing how he should behave in class and his perceived ideas of how he is seen as a student. He writes he prefers to work independently because, " I sometimes say to myself and say, 'Oh no I have to do my best work because some body is watching me'" (student work, October 24, 2003). In a classroom students learn quickly that someone is watching them. Lian wrote in his report card in the skills for school success section,

> Kerry is a contributing learner in our classroom. He tries his best to stay focused but finds it easy to get distracted. He consistently completes assignments on time and takes pride and care in his work. He shows respect to classmates and teachers. One goal of Kerry's will be to try and make better use of class time. I will be encouraging Kerry to volunteer in our Ravine School community. It is a pleasure to have Kerry in our classroom. (student report card, November 15, 2003)

These words reflect what Lian knows about Kerry but also what Kerry has said about himself in his personal assessment. This is how Lian and Kerry demonstrate their nested knowledge, but in a classroom nested knowledge is not only found in the relationship of the teacher and student. It also is a part of students' relationships with each other.

In a situated relationship with Leo, Kerry might say that he is good at talking. Leo, who sits beside him and likes to draw, might tell us Kerry is a good artist. Kerry knows, however, this activity is a communication with his teacher. Lian knows her reports are about communicating with parents and children. Everyone knows reports are about achievement and behaviour within a nested relationship bound by the expectations of school.

Kerry's March poem has a different tone to it. This may be attributed to a deeper relationship with his teacher, a greater understanding of himself as a student or perhaps more trust in his relationship with me. It might also indicate Kerry has settled into the rhythms and expectations of school. He might be, as Chamoiseau (1997) would see it, more domesticated as a student. There is also a more relaxed tone to this poem that I attribute to the opening line. School skills still factor in this poem, but there is a more personal tone.

Funny member of our classroom
and is responsible for his choices
Enjoys reading
Finds multiples and factors and
still working on problem solving
Enjoys reading
Can record observations accura-
tely with good detail
Enjoys reading
We have an artist in the room
and puts good effort into his pro-
jects
Enjoys reading
Participates in dance and on his
Skills in basketball
Enjoys reading (student work, April 2003)

This March poem demonstrates that Kerry has a smoother story of school. He enjoys reading and for him this is a shift, obviously a significant one. Instead of being easily distracted now he is responsible for his choices. This is a poem about a boy more in control of himself in school. For this reporting period there are no skills for school success sheets generated by the children that Lian used in her writing of the report cards. In order to see how Kerry is influenced by Lian's words I include here the skills for school success passage found at the beginning of his report card. The skills for school success is the beginning section for all the report cards.

> Kerry continues to be a helpful and funny member of our classroom. He keeps his
> desk clean, and is able to stay organized. He uses class time effectively and
> completes assignments on time. He has a good relationship with classmates and
> teachers and is responsible for his choices. He is still working on staying focused 6
> during listening times. One goal for Kerry's will be to keep putting good effort
> into his work. (student report card, March 21, 2003)

Instead of the student generated skills for school success worksheets prior to these report cards, the children kept a journal for a week at the beginning of March. The following week they created poems based on their journal entries. Here is the poem based on Kerry's Wednesday journal entry.

Wednesday

Paper air planes were made for science

3m and 72cm

Not far but you can LOL[3]
Laugh and Math time in room 3.
Carson and Mike were making me laugh.
Mike mentioned a burger bear at WallMart.
funny, funny, funny. (student work, March 10, 2003)

In this poem it is evident Kerry is enjoying himself. The boys are laughing and having fun making paper airplanes in school. They are enjoying each others' company. In the journal entry it is slightly different. He gives a much more detailed account of the day starting in the morning where he talks about the classes he attended and gives information about the music teacher's children. The music teacher had just returned from a maternity leave.

The paper airplanes are in the journal entry, but the laughter is not about boys getting along. Instead Kerry writes he is worried in math that Mike and Carson are going to get him into trouble because they are making him laugh so he moves. He has tried to avoid these two friends by sitting with other boys he knows, but Mike and Carson sit next to him so he is forced to move to another spot. It is interesting, given this poem and journal entry, that the first line of his found poem based on the report card is "Funny member of our classroom and is responsible for his choices."

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[3] Laugh Out Loud, used often in on-line conversation.

The place of the children in the report cards

The creation of the found poems functioned as methodology because they allowed me insight into how the children saw themselves in relation to the report cards. Writing the poems also allowed them to shape their identity around the report cards and exert some control over the words that were written about them. As a researcher it allowed me to look at how they saw themselves represented.

This way of understanding and working with the report cards was made clear to me in Christa's report card. Christa had been away in the fall when they wrote the poetry on their first report cards. She was given a brief explanation about the process and then asked to write the poetry like everyone else. This is what she wrote.

Progress report and Me

Out of effort I
Got three excellent
Out of A's, B's, and C's,
I got one A, three B's
And four C's
I was upset
I was upset
But one A to rise my
Fallen hopes
One A to please me
I am glad

I am glad

My hope rises and my thirst

Becomes stronger for another A

I am eager

I am eager (student work, April 2003)

In this poem Christa clearly demonstrates the connection between knower and knower. How Christa sees herself is shaped by the words Lian writes about her. Lian does not use letter grades, but Christa easily translates them. Just as found poetry distils the essence of a text to what the writer wishes, these poems distilled how the children saw themselves in relation to the words written about them. These poems demonstrate an understanding of their stories to live by in school. They tell me about their behaviour, their academic aspirations, the emotional impact of reporting, and what is important in terms of being in school.

Understanding the poems

When I consider Dillard's (1995) words, "[b]y entering a found text as a poem, the poet doubles its context. The original meaning remains intact, but now it swings between two poles. The poet adds or at any rate increases, the element of delight. … It serves up whole texts, or uninterrupted fragments of texts" (p. ix), I am struck at how adeptly the children accomplished this in their work. I could have read their reports and imagined what they meant to them, but instead, by having the children use them as generative pieces I had a context in which to understand the report cards from their perspectives.

When I read the report cards, I did not have the same sense of them as the children captured in their writing. They are report cards, respectful in tone, but wrapped up in the jargon of reporting. Here is a snapshot of Christa's report card.

> Christa is a helpful member of our classroom. She is able to complete most assignments on time, and is taking better responsibility and more of an interest in her learning. She continues to work on building relationships with others but does have some difficulty in this area. I am encouraging her to think situations through and make good decisions. Christa prefers to work independently. She shows adequate listening skills and is willing to share her ideas with the class. (student report card, March 21, 2003)

Significantly Christa's poem is not a found poem in the sense of Dillard's definition nor does it stay as close to the original text as those of the other children. Perhaps this is because she was absent for the earlier writing or perhaps it reflects Christa's way of making sense. When I look at the report card copy she worked from she highlighted the phrase, "effort excellent" three times and "work meets standard of excellence," which occurs only once in the area of art. However, beside all the phrases for achievement and effort she has written the corresponding letter grades, which comprise the main theme of her poem. It would seem that Christa understands report cards in this manner. They are a judgement of her ability according to a scale.

Christa, Kerry and the other children have helped me understand more about the wonders I have about children's knowledge in and of school. Many children wrote smooth tensionless poetry that reflected report cards that read the same way. Some children chose to make known the positive comments, ignoring the negative. Other children, like Christa and Kerry in his first report card, stayed with the tensions they felt around reporting.

Found poetry served the purpose I hoped it would. It allowed me to understand more about the children. Their work showed me things I would not have seen on my own nor would I have drawn the conclusions they did writing about themselves. I did want to go back to them and say why this, and how does this resonate with you, but somehow that would have defeated the purpose of this writing activity. They were telling me and it was my job to make those connections.

CHAPTER FOUR

Catrina: Ghost-girl-who-knows

Sloughboy and Catrina

Hide and seek Travis had come and gone and would be back again. Sloughboy liked playing with him and had learned new things in his company. One of them had been the pretending you are something else game. That had been fun and when he had told Coyote two days later they had had a good laugh over it. The laughter had led to a hide and seek game of their own, but Sloughboy was not quite good enough to seek the hiding Coyote without Coyote knowing it. He would watch Coyote to learn more about being able to seek when you are hiding.

Today, however, he was riding Cravenbeast. They had been to the poplar and had followed trails through the home of the trees. As they emerged into the grass between the slough and the trees they saw a not boy walking. Sloughboy knew this not boy was not boy because of some kind of difference.

Girl, said Cravenbeast, person also like you, same as Travis but more different.

They paused where they were and watched her walking and talking. Sloughboy could see no other person near her and wondered to whom she was speaking. He could hear grass and grass was not talking to her. Sloughboy played the seeking part of the game in order to discover who she was in conversation with *but he was not successful. Cravenbeast did not know either. Maybe Coyote would know but he was not around. Cravenbeast walked up to the girl who jumped when she saw them. She stopped talking.*

Are you a ghost? she asked.

Ghost?

Yeah, ghost, dead spirits trapped on Earth.

No, said Sloughboy.

What about that? And she pointed at Cravenbeast.

Sloughboy looked under and around him. The bony structure of Cravenbeast was at once under him and around his legs as they dangled in his empty middle. No he is not a ghost either, he is just who he is. Who were you talking to?

I was talking to the ghosts.

Can you see them? he asked.

No, but I was thinking they might be in this place. It looks haunted and I know about haunted places.

Sloughboy wondered what a haunted place might look like ... he looked around the slough. No it looked like a slough to him. He could imagine no ghosts here. Although maybe there was ... he had just learned to play ... maybe seeing ghosts was a new thing to know.

How do you see a ghost?

You can't actually see them. They're ghosts. The only time you can see them is under special conditions and during the day is not special enough.

Why are you looking now then?

I am looking for a place where they might be. I was talking to let them know if they were around that I was looking for them. I have some special powers and they might be able to hear my voice and I might be able to detect them.

Sloughboy liked this idea of things that were-there-not-there. He looked around him again. He couldn't see the wind, but he could feel it. It was there. He couldn't see his pool for swimming but it was there even if he couldn't see it. This idea was interesting. He was sceptical, but perhaps she did have special powers. He would wait and see.

My friend Leah and I have a special club and we hunt ghosts. She's younger than me, but we get along really well. We've found ghosts in lots of places. You have to know how to look. It might make me sound strange, even like a geek, but that's ok. I don't really mind being a geek. It only means I'm smart.

Geek? Ghosts? What was this girl talking about? Geek didn't sound like a word that was a good word. Although what made a good word he wondered. These visitors certainly made him think new things. Maybe he should ask.

Is a geek good or bad?

Well no one says it as a compliment if that's what you mean. I can't believe you haven't heard of the word geek. Anyway I only get called it because I'm good at my work. Like numbers and reading. So I don't care. Well actually I do care, but it doesn't make a difference so I try not to care and mostly I don't. Well sometimes I don't. So I came down here anyway to look for ghosts and to get away for a minute. Being a geek means you're different and I don't mind being different. Someday I will go to a new place and it won't matter anymore. I talked to my folks and they agree. In the new place I get to act and design things and everyone else is doing it too. I won't get called a geek there.

Sloughboy wondered who was calling her a geek. Why would someone speak words that were not really good and meant one thing but suggested another? Why did ghost girl think it was mostly ok? Cravenbeast swung his head and looked with his eyeless sockets at Sloughboy.

This girl is smart, he said.

What did he say? asked the girl.

He said you were smart.

At this she smiled. I am you know. I know a lot of things. My Mom taught me a lot of things before I went to school. I knew how to read really early and I can do interesting things with numbers. My mom made my brain get bigger by teaching me *all these things when I was little so I'm really smart now. I get some of my special powers from her and some from my dad.*

Sloughboy wondered what reading and numbers would do to make your brain bigger. He knew about reading many things in the slough. Reading them made him know things that were not right there in a straight-ahead looking kind of way. Learning to read the slough was a sideways kind of looking, but now it was just another way of looking. Numbers were less tangible to him, but necessary in some ways he didn't really think about. However, they seemed important to ghost girl. They seemed to be part of her name for herself. Already in his mind her name was becoming Ghost-girl-who-knows.

How do you see a ghost?

Well you can't look right at a ghost. They are never exactly where you are looking. Most people never see them. I can't see them all the time, but sometimes I can sense them. It is kind of like seeing something out of the corner of your eye, but you can't turn and look straight at them because you won't see them.

Sloughboy knew something about this kind of looking. But when he did it he had never seen anyone dead there. He wasn't sure if he believed her. But then it didn't seem important for her to have him believe.

Where do you live?

He pointed into the slough.

Really in there? Cool.

What's his name? She asked as she pointed to Cravenbeast.

Cravenbeast.

What is he?

He is the beast of knowledge.

Beast of knowledge?

Yes, he knows things. He takes me places so I can know them and he tells me things. He told me you were a girl.

You didn't know I was a girl? That's strange.

Sloughboy wondered if not knowing was strange or if he was strange. He wondered at the connection between the two and if there was one. He didn't feel strange but then no one or thing had ever suggested that he was ... until now. Mind you when he thought about it he didn't feel strange and she hadn't said he was strange, although maybe he was to Ghost-girl-who-knows. She was certainly strange to him. He had never even met a girl before. Although if she knew things maybe he could ask her what she thought.

Am I strange?

Yes, but in a cool way. I like it. Who else do I know who rides around on a horse skeleton? Who do I know who doesn't even know what a girl is? Or heard of ghosts? By the way, why is he a skeleton?

Because he drowned in the slough many years ago and this is all that was left of him after.

After?

Yes, after he came back out of the water. After he was light enough to get out.

So he's dead. He's a ghost.

Cravenbeast looked at Sloughboy. I am not a ghost.

He says he's not a ghost. And besides I can see him when I look at him straight-ahead.

True, she said. Can he see the dead though?

I cannot see the dead ... although I know some of their stories.

No, he can't, but he knows some of their stories.

Cool. I know some of the dead's stories too. I know a lot of stories. I make some of them up. When I grow up one of the things I want to be is a writer.

Sloughboy wondered why she needed to grow up any larger. She seemed tall enough to him. He did not know about this growing up, of becoming different than who you are. But she seemed to know about it. She seemed certain of it in fact.

Why do you want to grow up Ghost-girl-who-knows?

What did you say?

Why do you want to grow up Ghost-girl-who-knows?

No, I mean the last part.

Ghost-girl-who-knows?

Why did you call me that?

Because that is who you are.

And then she laughed. She tipped her head back and laughed and laughed. You are a pretty strange kid she said. But I like that name. My real name is Catrina, but you can call me Ghost-girl-who-knows if you want. It's cool. I have to go now. I am still looking for ghosts. I'll come again.

And Sloughboy watched her walk away looking sideways but not looking sideways. Trying to see what was not there.

Beginning the research relationship with Catrina

It was the first time we had had a conversation on our own and we were using the small office behind the computer room and the now vacant Grade5/6 room. The teacher who had been teaching in this room had been surplused and relocated to a school in the downtown area. It was, coincidentally, Catrina's room at the beginning of the year. We walked through and she pointed out that this was the room she had been in with Mr. Ridley. I lodged this in the back of my mind. I knew she had been in the class that was absorbed into other rooms. I had already been working with the class for the first week of school when she and some of her original classmates had been moved into the classroom, swelling it to over 30 students. We sat and started the conversation. To my surprise it was mostly about ghosts and her experience with them.

This experience with ghosts was not only at home, but also in other dwellings in which she had lived, different family members' homes and, surprisingly, the school. Her old classroom, the one through which we had just passed, was full of them. She recounted a story of flickering lights and dripping water to me. I was amazed by her story and told her so. I worked hard at believing it. I wondered why she was telling me this story, particularly in this first visit. When I asked if she was pulling my leg, she told me she was not. I put on my believing face and followed the story.

She told me one of the portables outside was also haunted. She had seen things moving inside it. Her friend in Grade 4 was with her when she saw it. The portable was only used for storage. She told me she had a club of ghost hunters. For Catrina there were ghosts everywhere.

In our next conversation she mentioned ghosts only in response to a question of mine. It would be a while before we had another ghost tale. I was intrigued that the first conversation was so filled with stories of ghost.

Earlier, she told the class that her father and mother had extra powers. Catrina's teacher, Lian, stopped her before she went too far into it. Already the other children were watching her as Lian stopped the conversation,

> [Lian] told me how, when they were talking the other day about special abilities, Catrina had told the class how her dad could move things with his eyes and that her mom had ESP and that her and her sister had a bit of both talents. Serena

> immediately turned around and asked her what she meant by the statement that her dad could move things with his eyes. Lian intervened and said that she didn't mean anything. Lian was concerned that Catrina was setting herself up for grief in the class. Lian was beginning to think when Catrina raised her hand "what is she going to come up with now?" and that she had to run interference with her and the class. (notes to file, October 24, 2003)

I had this story in the back of my head as I listened to her stories of ghosts, stories of ghosts at school, at home, in previous schools. As she told me these stories she wove in and out of other topics. We talked about books she had read that reflect the theme of ghosts and the supernatural. She began to tell a story of Mr. Ridley and a drawing game and then moved to a story of ghosts in the classroom and her certainty of this by asking other children in other classrooms if the same happened in their rooms. Their negative response to her query confirmed the activity as that of the work of ghosts.

As I listened I wondered how other children perceived her and we had a brief conversation about teasing. In this discussion we talked about teasing that is kind and teasing that is not. This led her to a story about her dad and how he teased her and was a good storyteller; how he used different voices to tell her stories and scared her with his stories. We talked about how she teased other students in the class. I had watched her do this in the room. My observations led me to think she was intentional in this, but as the year progressed, I saw less and less of this as she seemed to withdraw.

Then we moved into a conversation about square roots and how her mother helped prepare her for school before moving back to yet another story about ghosts. She told me a story about how this school was haunted because of a murder that took place in the farmhouse that originally stood in the location of the school. I asked if this is true, a line I would use often throughout our conversations, and she assured me it was true. She told me she had read about it in a book.

Catrina: Like there was a house here.

Shaun: Oh, OK and how do you know somebody was murdered in it?

Catrina: Because of history books.

Shaun: What history books?

Catrina: There's history books in the public library about this neighbourhood and that another kid ...

Shaun: So if I went to the public library I could get that book and read it.

Catrina: Yeah, but I have it right now.

Shaun: Why don't I believe you?

Catrina: I don't know.

Shaun: Is it that smile on your face again?

Catrina: No.

Shaun: Is it when you try to get that serious look and you cover your mouth so I can't see you smiling.

Catrina: I'm not smiling.

Shaun: You're trying hard not to.

Catrina: OK, now I am because there was something really funny.

Shaun: Yeah but so you just made that whole piece up about the haunted
house ....

Shaun: Why do you like to make up the stories about the haunted stuff?

Catrina: I don't. All these are true ... (taped conversation, November 18,
2002)

There was an element of the playful in our conversations as in the one above. I questioned her in a disbelieving manner, smiling, and she responded in like, but did not veer from her story. I liked to rely on the idea of our relationship as a space that allowed me to challenge her stories with the question of truth and her constant assertions that they are indeed true. I relied on this because when I challenged her on these stories they did not dry up and disappear. Catrina kept telling them to me. Later, as she told me different stories of how she was in school, stories tied more closely to her experience with others, I was more careful in questioning the truth in them. Those stories seemed to be more important to who she was in school, to how she maintained a narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) of her story of self in the larger story of being a girl in a Grade 5/6 classroom. To my ear they rang with the notion of fiction, to her, I would suggest, they did not.

The theme of moving in and out of stories continued in that first recorded meeting. We talked about her friend, a Grade 4 student named Louise. In her story of Louise she told me about how they played at recess. This came out of my question about what she did at recess. This question followed on a story of bullies at her last school and a cousin who bullied her dog. In her story of Louise she told me about a game they played about unicorns. She started off talking about playing on the monkey bars and then when I asked, "What else do you do out at recess" Catrina said, "Well, we play unicorns" (taped conversation, November 18, 2002). Catrina and Louise played unicorns because Louise believed for a while that she was a unicorn. Catrina told me that Louise had a mark on her forehead that made her think it could be a spot where a horn could have grown. Catrina then went on to tell me that she was a unicorn as well. She gave me her reasons for this and they are as follows,

> Catrina: Hmmm, it's because like, then I started playing along with that and saying I was a unicorn, which I kind of believe now for a different reason.
>
> Shaun: Yeah, why.
>
> Catrina: It's 'cause of the shield that our family has. It's a picture of a lion and a unicorn and, and then it ... says Leslie's Unite. So I think that we are unicorns or something.
>
> Shaun: But you know what those shields are about, eh? That, that people pick those things to represent things, that they're symbols.
>
> Catrina: Yeah, unicorn and the lion represent our family.
>
> Shaun: Like in our family we have a lion holding wheat. Right. So, we weren't lions we just, the lion just stands for whatever.
>
> Catrina: Yeah, but I think we're unicorns for another reason.
>
> Shaun: Why?
>
> Catrina: It's because some people believed that, this is really weird but all of a sudden their skin will start changing colours and then they get

> … like wood shells and stuff. And at my old house, um like I was sick so of course my hands were and stuff would turn like white because I turn pale when I'm really sick. (taped conversation, November 18, 2002)

Later I struggled to make sense of these stories, but at the moment of hearing them I was amazed at how she moved in and out of them, jumping from topic to topic. Another theme in this conversation was the theme of how her mother helped her be a better student at school. This story of being more prepared, knowing things beyond her peer group, the square roots for example, was both a story of success in school and a source for some of the tensions she experiences with others. As a source of tensions we returned to talking about bullies and teasing.

As I read the transcripts and wrote this text I was reminded of Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience. Thinking about my conversations with Catrina I felt I was caught in a tangled web of situation and continuity. Other research participants would talk to me in ways where I could easily see a pattern or path of situation and continuity. In my conversations with Catrina I was always asking questions, trying to return to previous topics, wondering if what I was hearing was true, and at times caught into the conversation, making jumps of my own and taking us down conversational routes that made no sense as I reread them.

More than any of the other participants, Catrina forced me to confront the idea of fiction in our lives. In a conversation with Jeanette, the principal, when we talked about the children with whom I wanted to work, she cautioned me about Catrina. The following is from the conversation,

> Jeanette: Be careful with Catrina. ... Just there's certainly a weirdness with Catrina ....
>
> Shaun: Mmmhmm, yeah. I'm never sure with Catrina if she's doing it because she knows she's going to elicit that response.
>
> Jeanette: Yes ... She likes a reaction.
>
> Shaun: Yeah.
>
> Jeanette: And she does lots of things to elicit a reaction ...
>
> Shaun: No. ...
>
> Jeanette: She called, she's one of these people that I look at her and I say, "She cultivates the notion that she is different."
>
> Shaun: Yes.
>
> Jeanette: And she cultivates it.
>
> Shaun: Yes she does.
>
> Jeanette: and whether she's hiding the, the fact that she is different through the cultivating of being deliberately different or whether it's strictly the, the wrinkle in her personality that says, "I'm smarter than you and I'm going to suck you in." ... Probably a bit of both. I think there's some weirdness that she cultivates because of being weird.
>
> Shaun: Yeah, yes.

Jeanette: And I'm using weird because I don't want to be judgemental about what it is but there is …

Shaun: Yeah …

Jeanette: She's another watcher. She's watching something now. (taped conversation, October 28, 2002)

In this conversation Jeanette did not change my sense of Catrina. Certainly she highlighted many things, but at the same time Jeanette indicated her respect for Catrina. Like me she wondered at some of Catrina's actions and tried to make a space for her in understanding her stories and actions. As I sat and listened to Catrina in this first meeting and in some of the subsequent meetings I recalled my conversation with Jeanette realizing that Catrina had a larger story on the school landscape. In this place of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), Catrina's story was that much different.

In the story of Catrina I began to see her as a shape shifter. When I began to work in the class I was drawn to Catrina. Often as her teacher talked, Catrina would draw. Many of these drawings were makeovers. She would draw a girl very dishevelled, often in strange clothes with messy hair and a blotchy complexion. In the second drawing, after the "makeover," the girl would look sleek and groomed. When I asked Catrina about the drawings she told me she was going to run a makeover salon one day. In an interesting turn of events, one day she also began to draw makeovers of dogs and told me she would run the two businesses, one for women and one for dogs, next door to each other. I suggested that perhaps she might want to build separate entrances. She laughed and said it was a good idea.

Making herself over was a way I began to see Catrina. Her personal appearance was largely consistent. It was in her stories that I saw Catrina the shape shifter. At times she was the avid reader, a girl who talked about square roots, and someone whose spelling skill was a cause for being ostracized in her class. At other times she was the girl who saw ghosts everywhere, a girl who explained the death of a pet by the visit of a witch, being a unicorn because of a family crest and pale skin when she was ill. Her imagination and vocabulary always led me to expect that she would write deep insightful pieces, but whenever we set assignments that might elicit these responses her work lacked depth and was done in such a hurry that there was no opportunity to think deeply about the topic. Contradiction and shifting became words I used to describe Catrina as I thought about her and talked with other adults about her, however, respect for her was also always part of those conversations.

This way of being in school had repercussions for Catrina. One of the people with whom she played was a girl in the grade below her. This was the girl with the unicorn marking, Louise. Eventually Louise's teacher decided Catrina was not the best playmate for Louise and told the girls they could no longer play together. I explored this in the following Sloughboy story.

Catrina and friends

She is standing at the edge of the slough again. Straining to see beyond the waving grass and trembling willow. A breeze stirs the slough and the whispering of

the grass alerts him to her presence. This is how she is, always waiting to be asked, hoping to step into the slough and so he invites her to walk in the grass and see the still pools of water.

Walking beside her he asks if she had found any ghosts since she was last here.

Are you making fun of me? she asks.

No. I am not making fun of you. Last time you told me you were looking for ghosts and I wondered if you had found any.

No. I haven't found any ghosts, but they are all around. I have lived in houses where there were ghosts and there are some in my school. I have some friends and they help me look for them sometimes.

Where are your friends today? he says as he looks around wondering at the air of loneliness that encases her.

Louise isn't allowed to play with me after school. I think it has something to do with her heritage.

Heritage?

Yes, where her family comes from and stuff like that.

Sloughboy does not know what she means. How do people come from some place and what kind of stuff can make you a friend in one place and not a friend in *another. Ghost-girl-who-knows thinks interesting things. But he wonders at her having only one friend. Does she have others he wonders? He asks.*

Yes, of course I do. I have a band that I started with some other friends. But one of them moved away and another isn't allowed to come over anymore so it's just two of us. My dad said he would help us make a CD if we kept practicing and got any good.

Band? CD? Heritage? Sloughboy didn't really have any idea what she was talking about, but he nodded.

Do you have many friends at your school? He didn't really have a clear sense of school yet, but slowly, as the others told him stories he was getting a sense of what it might be.

No, not really. I told you about Louise. I have another friend called Kathy, but we don't always get along. I thought I had another friend, but I made the mistake of telling other girls about him and then the teacher asked him what was going on and he denied it. That was embarrassing. I was going to buy him some candy after school, but after the teacher talked to him he didn't want to go with me.

She nodded to herself as if confirming some idea she had just thought of, but she didn't speak of it out loud. Then she looked directly at him.

Is that how you always dress?

Sloughboy looks at his simple clothing. Plain, worn, sun-bleached, and slough stained; it is what he wears everyday and gives it no more thought than he gives his skin.

Yes, is his reply. This is how I always dress. He wonders at why she mentions this to him.

Is dressing important?

She snorts. Of course it is. Everyone has to be dressed.

She drops her head and chuckles to herself. He wonders what she finds amusing and asks her.

Clothing is important. Looking good is important. Fashion is important. I can't believe you don't know this, everyone knows that fashion is important. I know a lot about fashion.

How do you know this? he asks.

They have come to a pool of water with a large stone on its edge. They sit in the sun and breeze. The grass bend their blades in their direction. They are intrigued by the voice of this girl and what she knows. They dance in the breeze, but their focus is Ghost-girl-who-knows.

I'll tell you how I know. My mom taught me, I look at magazines and I draw makeovers for people. Sometimes people ask me for advice and I tell them. My *family also has some French in their background and the French are very fashion conscious.*

This is confusing Sloughboy. He does not understand the idea of fashion. He looks around searching for understanding as her words roll through his head.

He looks up to see her watching him. These new friends are always watching he decides. If they are not trying to catch things out of the corner of their eyes they are looking up through their lids or, as she is doing now, looking straight at him. When she sees him looking back, she looks away.

Looking away she asks him if he knows the story of Cinderella.

Cinderella?

Obviously not. Cinderella was this girl whose mother and father died and she was an orphan. Before her father died he had remarried this woman who had two daughters. When her father died the woman and her daughters were very unkind to Cinderella. They made her work in the house even though they could have had servants do the work and they made her wear rags, even though she was the most beautiful girl by far. It is obvious they were jealous of her and so they figured they could make themselves feel better by treating her badly and wearing nice clothes. Anyway the family gets invited to a ball, which is a party, for the prince so that he can find a wife. Cinderella thinks that she will get to go too, but they have other *plans for her and make her stay at home while they get dressed up and leave. But Cinderella has a fairy godmother who uses magic to make her beautiful.*

I thought she already was beautiful? Sloughboy is getting confused by this story.

Yes, she was beautiful, but the fairy godmother gave her beautiful clothes, did her hair, and used makeup to make her even more beautiful. To make a long story short she went to the ball, the prince saw how beautiful she was, fell in love, and after a few hassles found her and they got married.

Sloughboy had never heard a story such as this one. It was full of strange ideas. Why did you tell me this story?

Because, silly, it tells you how important fashion can be.

Sloughboy looks at her without the slightest idea of the connection she is trying to make.

Let me make it simple, she says. Even though she was beautiful, her family treated her badly and she had no friends. When she got dressed the right way and looked good, then she had friends. It's really, actually very easy to understand.

Now Sloughboy looked at her in the manner of Travis, catching her from the corner of his eye. He wondered, looking at her, if this is the story she wants for herself and he felt sad at such wishing from this smart storytelling new friend.

Where does a person find a fairy godmother he thought? He watched her looking into the pool. She was looking at something in the water. He looked to see what she was seeing and he could not see anything moving in it. Then he realized she was looking at the surface of the water where she could see her reflection. In the breeze her face distorted on the small ripples and she was alone in the image of herself. He knew this girl had the power to tell stories that extended her reflection with the reflections of others, but today, in the slough, in this pool of water, she was alone.

Catrina and the bullies: Practical knowledge in action

A common thread in our conversations was the topic of bullies. This thread of bullies followed Catrina from school to school. As a researcher, this story of bullies had a complex effect on me. I was appreciative of the continuity of this story in Catrina's experience of school. It added a layered quality to my understanding of her experience with bullies at school. However, it was troubling to me to hear this ongoing story of torment. Catrina did not tell a consuming story of daily torment, but she told it often enough for it to be central piece in her experience of school. In order to deal with it Catrina developed strategies. This was an example of her practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983) at work as she dealt with the relational.

She learned at one school that if she told the teachers, her chances of being bullied further would increase. She brought this story forward to her current school, Ravine

Elementary. She recounted a story of being pushed in a crosswalk on her way home after school. This story came out of a question from me about her physical safety at school. She did not tell anyone, her parents or school personnel. In her words, "I just, well I didn't tell them anything because I was scared that they'd do something else and the bullies would um do that to me more and they will" (taped conversation, February 5, 2003). I would suggest that given her previous experience at other schools this was the logical response. She did indicate that now she would tell, even though she still sometimes experienced repercussions.

Part of this willingness to tell was the manner in which she perceived her current teacher, Lian, and how she dealt with the situations. Another important piece was her increased courage and in one situation, her willingness to take the issue of teasing up with one girl's mother. The girl, Faye, was a member of her class. Catrina spoke to Faye's mother, a lunch supervisor in the school, three times with no noticeable change in the teasing. Finally Faye's mother said she would speak to the girls' teacher, Lian. It was Lian who affected a change in the problem. In an interesting aside, she talked to Catrina about coming to her rather than the parent. In the conversation Catrina and I had about this she told me she went to the parent in the first place because she thought the parent might have more influence over Faye than the school.

When I asked her how she became so brave she said, "I am not brave. I'm afraid of the dark" (taped conversation, January 22, 2003). I suggested, in the conversation, that she could be brave about some things and not others. When I asked again how she became so brave she replied she did not know. Then, to my prodding and praise for being brave, she responded, "Probably because I faced ghosts and they are a lot easier to deal with. I have! [in response to my scepticism] At my old house and in my old school … Mmmhmm, so I faced ghosts and they can't be much harder than people" (taped conversation, January 22, 2003). To my surprise the ghosts had returned. We had not talked about ghosts since the initial conversation. Perhaps, the nervousness of that initial meeting required the courage she possessed from being a girl who deals with ghosts.

Another strategy Catrina used was to turn the teasing to her advantage, therefore, having some power in it. A common expression used by others to tease her was "Catrina germs." This phrase was used by members of the class, students in other Grade 5/6 classrooms, and, surprisingly, by some of the primary children. According to Catrina it happened often and by "Kids all over. Even the primaries" (taped conversation, February 22, 2003). She would use this expression herself to make a space in a circle or game, or sometimes to even just bug kids. She was thoughtful in this and not just victimized.

> Shaun: And so, so that you just make it into a joke?
>
> Catrina: Yeah.
>
> Shaun: And then is, is it better than before?
>
> Catrina: Mmmm.
>
> Shaun: And why does it get better?
>
> Catrina: Because like now they'll stop a little bit because they're like, "Hey, how it, why is she playing this game?"
>
> Shaun: And how does it make you feel in the classroom

Catrina: Well it's a little bit better. The only time I don't like is when they like, "Oh, oh Catrina, oh oh, I just touched her chair, aaaaah." (taped conversation, February 5, 2003)

It was, nevertheless, complex because even though she did manage some control over it, laughing about it, turning it on others, it still had the power to hurt.

Catrina's self-making narrative

Bruner (2002) writes,

> A self-making narrative is something of a balancing act. It must, on the one hand, create a conviction of autonomy, that one has the will of one's own, a certain freedom of choice, a degree of possibility. But it must also relate the self to a world of others—to friends and family, to institutions, to the past, to reference groups. But the commitment to others that is implicit in relating to others of course limits our autonomy. We seem virtually unable to live without both, autonomy and commitment, and our lives strive to balance the two. So do the self-narratives we tell ourselves. (p. 78)

There was certainly a thread of balancing in Catrina's story. The more I listened to her the more I became aware of this and wondered at how she maintained this act while maintaining her coherence. Some of her success might have been attributed to her playfulness with reality; still her willingness to confront others and not be intimidated by them must have helped. However, in repeated conversations with her teacher I could not help but notice a withdrawnness that was at odds with how I perceived her at the beginning of the year. Part of this withdrawing I felt related to more of an awareness of others and their influence on her. As children age they may become more attuned to the cultural story in which they live. For girls this is significant as they work within cultural stories of appearance and behaviour (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This was no different for Catrina.

As I noted earlier, the ghost stories began to take up less space in our conversations. Instead, and significantly, Catrina began to talk more and more of fashion. This was not a new theme. In the field notes I wrote about her makeover drawings. What changed is how she began to story herself within a story of fashion.

This story of fashion was a story she told herself, but one that was also being acted out in the classroom by other children. Clothing was important to them. Appearance was something they worked at to suit their image of self. Dylan, who liked to wear clothes that might be considered to fit an image of gang clothing, more than once commented to me that he liked these kind of clothes and didn't wear them because he was in any gang. Barb began to wear makeup, her eyes dark with liner and mascara, a line of blush on her cheeks. Other girls had their hair up, new clothes, and I overheard conversations about clothes as I listened while working in the class.

What was interesting about Catrina was that she saw herself as an expert on fashion. She told me how others asked her for fashion advice. I was never privy to these conversations she had with others and she never actually gave me names. The verisimilitude of these stories weighed on my mind. I had been caught out before in my questions of "is this true?". My sense was that there was probably a kernel of truth to what she was saying in so much that on one day in one instance someone might have asked her a question about fashion. What Catrina did, however, was build that into a pervasive story of self, the fashion expert.

To be frank, this story Catrina told did not match her appearance. She seemed quite casual in how she looked. Her hair did not always look brushed, nor did I ever have any sense from her that it was important. Her clothes could be slightly dishevelled and out of date. When I carefully asked her about her clothes, wondering what she might say about them given her knowledge of fashion, she was able to tell me how they matched by colour, and, in this, she was correct. Being from a large family with limited income and knowing how this affected the amount of clothes you could purchase, I wondered if money was an issue in the kinds of clothes she could afford to own. In response to questions around the purchase of clothes this did not seem to be one of the issues. I learned to live with the ambiguity of the story she told and the one I observed.

What was of interest to me was the importance this story had in the story she told of herself. Another development in our conversations, one that coincided with the growing place of fashion, was the topic of boys. I admit that I do not have much experience in the narratives of 11-year-old girls and their thoughts about boys, but I was struck by how much she talked about them, and to a certain extent the intensity. Observing her in the class I would not think these topics were important to her. Catrina was a girl who ate up her schoolwork. It was done quickly, showed evidence of thought, if not a lot of concern for appearance, and was important to her. Catrina was a girl who sees the importance of schoolwork and its means to an end.

Once again Catrina made me wonder about the creation of fictions in our stories to live by. I could not help but wonder about the role of coherence in her self-narrative (Carr, 1986). The complexity in which she lived amazed me. Her use of relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994) seemed to be a one-sided conversation based on a cultural story and her observations of others. The development of her relational knowledge was in reaction to others rather than in interaction. I became aware of this in an issue around a CD and students' reactions to it in the classroom.

Fashion and music: Relational knowledge

Popularity was important to Catrina. The importance she placed on it was in contrast to her experience of it. Many of her classmates reacted negatively to being placed next to her when the monthly seating plan was introduced. Lian, the teacher, was thoughtful in who she placed next to Catrina. In this careful consideration are elements of nested knowledge (Lyons, 1990). Lian was making shifts in seating different students next to Catrina knowing what she did about Catrina and her newest seating partner. Each time there was a new seating plan there were negative reactions from those who ended up next to Catrina. Lian, however, based on what she knew, was successful in the long run with every seating relationship that involved Catrina. Seating arrangements are works of choreography in the life of the classroom. They take into account children's abilities and personalities. As the teacher of these students Lian had a sense of who would be best off beside each other. She took into account the concepts of friendship, boundaries, tensions, and, in the vernacular of school, what would be best for the students. As their teacher

Lian possessed a story of each child and she was also constructing a story of what the class should be. What would be best for Catrina always factored into who was seated next to her. Lian knew that with certain students, once they had the opportunity to spend time with Catrina, they would come to appreciate her contributions and personality through the intimate working conditions of sitting right next to someone. In all ten of the seating arrangements that occurred over the year, Lian was correct in her predictions of success for Catrina in these relationships. These seating arrangements did not always begin smoothly however.

In the first seating arrangement shift that occurred once the class knew each other better at the beginning of October, Catrina was seated next to Sula. Sula sat as far away on her chair from Catrina as physically possible in order to put distance between them. Her discomfort was evident. When Lian called Sula up to speak with her, Sula began to cry. Later Lian told me Sula thought she was being punished by this new seating arrangement. Lian assured her that she was not and that she had been chosen to sit beside Catrina because she was kind and Lian thought she would make a good partner for Catrina. Mollified by this Sula returned to her seat and seemed less obvious in her discomfort (notes to file, October 3, 2002). As the days passed Sula and Catrina could be observed working together and even laughing. Sula grew to appreciate Catrina's artistic ability, a skill she possessed as well.

It is possible, as Catrina's seating partners came to know her, that they were surprised by the recognizable person (Miller, 1990) they discovered through their interactions. I do not know this because I never asked them. What I did learn from watching them and talking to Lian and Catrina, was the fun that could occur in these relationships and how, according to Catrina, they helped each other with schoolwork. Getting to know Catrina in the classroom helped her feel a part of a community in that space. However, on the playground she continued to play with younger children.

One day, in a conversation, Catrina told me how she was also known for her taste in music and how this was making her popular. Because I had not noticed an appreciable difference in her and her relationships in the classroom I questioned the truth of this new story. In part of this conversation she told me that her pet tarantula had escaped and was loose in the school. When we finally established that she is indeed making this story up I leapfrogged to asking her if the music story was true. In this story she would not be shifted. I backed away from my questions of truth and made a note to ask the teacher. What was significant in this conversation was the direct manner in which Catrina and I talked about the importance of popularity and how clothing fashion and music can affect it.

Shaun: … So OK let me ask you this question. Is school a happy place for you?

Catrina: Sometimes.

Shaun: Sometimes?

Catrina: Not always, but sometimes.

Shaun: And what makes it happy?

Catrina: When you're popular.

Shaun: When you're popular.

Catrina: And now I am so it's happy.

Shaun: And so tell me about being popular now then? How are you popular now?

Catrina: In fashions, CDs,

Shaun: Fashion cities?

Catrina: Fashion and CDs.

Shaun: So you're popular because of the clothes you wear now.

Catrina: And the CDs that I can bring. (taped conversation, March 26, 2003)

In this piece of the research Catrina talked for the first time about fashion with examples of others participating in her construction of knowledge. It was the first time she talked about popularity and happiness. Working with Catrina always raised issues for me in understanding the relational in her experience of school. Reading the transcripts left me thinking her knowledge of self in relation to others was formed by her response to their reactions rather than through any kind of positive ongoing interaction. Here she was giving me examples of talking about fashion and music that led to interactions with others. I must admit, however, to being sceptical. With this scepticism in mind I asked her teacher when we returned to the class if there had been a CD.

Lian told me that there had indeed been a CD. Other girls in the class thought the CD belonged to Lian and were surprised when she told them it was Catrina's. She told me how a few of the girls came up and were dancing in a group to the music. Catrina was watching this all from her desk and smiling. Eventually she joined them, dancing on the outside of the group. The girls had not opened a space for her. Lian did not think this was out of any intention to be malicious, but rather they did not notice her there. After a while Catrina returned to her seat.

This is not the version Catrina told me. In her version she joined the girls, dancing among them and even singing along with one of the other girls. Her story was a much more positive one than the one Lian told. I wondered, as I did throughout the work with Catrina, how she made sense of these moments. Certainly she told a more positive story than experience would support. But, as Catrina herself said, being popular made her happy. Why, then, would any of us want to interrupt a story that brought her happiness?

The tensions in this story centred on Catrina's experience. Whose version do we privilege? It is seductive to take Lian's word as definitive, but the experience does not belong to her. Rather it is Catrina's story that must be taken as the defining story of what happened as the girls danced together at Lian's desk. For Catrina it was a moment of belonging in a space of her design by offering the CD to be played. As a researcher, it was a lesson for me to attend to how I listened to the stories of my participants.

Elements of nested knowledge: Scaffolding experience or awake and dreaming?

An ongoing dimension of Lian's work with Catrina was the scaffolding of experience (Huber & Clandinin, 2004). An early example of this was the interruption of Catrina's story of her parents' special powers. Lian's intent there was to prevent Catrina from making herself sound odd within the typical narratives of experience of other students. The thoughtful placement of students beside Catrina could be considered another way Lian was scaffolding experiences for Catrina. Lian's attempts to help

Catrina build community could be considered successful in the temporal space of each month. What we don't know is if these seating arrangements affected her relationships with these students over time. Certainly they did not become playmates and fast friends, but they certainly were not children who were part of the teasing that factored so largely in Catrina's experience of school.

Another important scaffolding process Lian engaged in with Catrina was in the books she encouraged her to read. Two books stood out in this process. They were *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000) and *Awake and Dreaming* (Pearson, 1996). Lian's reasons for choosing these books were based on the experiences of the characters in the story. The protagonists of both stories were girls who did not fit within the typical pervasive plotlines of children in school. When I asked Catrina what she thought of *Stargirl*, which she read independently, her responses indicated she enjoyed the book, but she did not give much depth in her responses. When I observed her reading the book in the classroom she was usually engrossed in it and a few times was reading it when she should have been listening.

Both Lian and I thought that *Awake and Dreaming* would be an excellent book for Catrina to read. In it a young girl, unhappy with her own life, dreams of living with a family she meets on ferry trip. The book seamlessly weaves in and out of the reality of the girl's life and her dream of belonging to this perfect family. Lian and I both wondered what this story might mean for Catrina. We also wondered, and worried, what it might suggest to her about the stories she told of ghosts, fashion, and popularity. In the end Lian decided to read the book aloud to the class. This was the last read aloud book of the school year, which Lian finished reading during the last week of school. Among the class members it was the favourite book of the year. Lian had them rank the read aloud books and write how they felt about each one. Some of the students wrote insightful paragraphs about *Awake and Dreaming*. Catrina, however, did not. Once again Lian and I were surprised by the lack of depth in Catrina's response. The tension Lian and I experienced with Catrina and her work stemmed from her ability to make connections easily, demonstrate an understanding of concepts and assignments, and the power of observation she demonstrated in conversation juxtaposed with the lack of depth in her response orally and in written work. We could never decide whether this perceived lack of response was an avoidance of the issue or a fact of her work.

Lian made important attempts to scaffold experiences for Catrina. Another way of thinking about this is the scaffolding of epistemological shifts or shifts in a story to live by. This was an element of nested knowledge (Lyons, 1990). Nested knowledge refers to how knowers know knowers. The basis for this is the epistemological basis for how we know and the shifts in that knowing that can occur as experiences are created that may alter the knower. Lyons discusses teachers' knowledge of students, one equation in the relationship. The idea of knowers knowing knowers is complex and multiperspectival. Lian knew some things about Catrina and Catrina knew some things about herself through Lian's knowledge. However, Catrina also knew something about Lian and Lian, to fulfil the equation, then knew something about herself through how Catrina knows. Their reactions to each other precipitated further layers of knowing. In this spiralling model of understanding, how someone might use their knowledge in the world is the fundamental question of the teacher and student's views of knowledge. This can be explained by thinking about children's and teachers' stories to live by. Nested knowledge shapes our narrative knowledge and alters people's stories to live by in school. It can be viewed in the reverse, the narrative knowledge we create or come to, can shape the nested knowledge of children and teachers.

For Lian, the idea of nested knowledge informed her and helped her make decisions about her work with Catrina and the other members of the class. In my work with Lian throughout the year the understanding she demonstrated of the children's stories to live by was complex and individuated. She used this understanding to think about how Catrina might be made more a part of the classroom community when she arranged their seating. She was thoughtful about how the history she shared with Travis might support his year with her. She considered the importance of Leo's mother on Leo's landscape of school. I would like to suggest that her understanding of these various stories to live by was filtered through her own ways of knowing, one that made possible the scaffolding success she experienced with her students. As their teacher, she was deeply embedded in relational knowledge (Hollingsworth, 1994) through the relationships she had with her students. In her relationship with Catrina she paid particular attention to Catrina's relationships with other students. She attended to Catrina's academic achievement but this was secondary to her work with the relational aspects of Catrina's experience of school.

In *Awake and Dreaming* the protagonist dreams herself into a life of happiness and security. Gently Lian hoped to awaken Catrina to her dream of popularity. Mindful of how this dream helped Catrina see who she was in the classroom Lian had concerns about how the book might adversely affect Catrina's story of self. It did not, however, transpire that the story opened up new paths for conversation around Catrina's story of fashion and the desire for popularity. I can only wonder that, for Catrina, it was no fiction.

Lian's use of nested knowledge

One day when I arrived at school Lian told me Catrina had told her and some of the girls in class that she was Leo's girlfriend and they were going to a convenience store by the school after school ended that day. Lian expressed her concern that Catrina was opening herself to more teasing from the girls. When Lian talked to Leo about it he denied anything was going on. When she talked to Catrina about it she told her she shouldn't be making stories up that could end up with her getting teased by other students in the class. When I talked to Catrina about the incident she told me a slightly different version about the convenience store and Leo.

Catrina: Well what happened is me and Leo were supposed to go to the [convenience store] over, over um after school.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: And um so I got so excited about that that I told a lot, two of my friends and the teacher that he was my new boyfriend.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: And it's none of her, it's none of anyone's business if it, um like um if I have a boyfriend or not but I just told them because I trusted them.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: Miss Elliot told him and our plans got cancelled and so Leo ended up lying and I got in trouble.

Shaun: And how did Leo lie?

Catrina: Well like you said, he never said that he said, and he said he said no. And he didn't. (taped conversation, February 5, 2003)

It was evident in this conversation that Catrina felt betrayed by both Lian and Leo. She was betrayed by Lian who confronts Leo and chose to believe his version of him and Catrina and by Leo in his denial of the pending meeting at the convenience store. Catrina had decided Leo was her new boyfriend because he had agreed to go to the convenience store after school and let her buy him candy. While it was understandable from Leo's point of view that they were not boyfriend and girlfriend, they had decided to go to the store together. When Leo denied this, he confirmed Lian's suspicions that Catrina was telling a fiction. In this moment Lian privileged Leo's version over Catrina's based on her knowledge of the two of them in school. Another way of understanding this might be to say that Lian used her nested knowledge to understand a story taking place in the class. However, in this instance this nested knowledge was based on what Lian perceived to be true, rather than empirical evidence from both students. Leo, who denied the story, and Catrina, who did not refute it, aided her in this understanding. Perhaps they did this because of their nested knowledge about the power of teachers in school, even though this was not the typical story of Lian in the classroom. However, it was still a component of her story to live by with the children.

Whose story?

It would seem the stories Catrina told could be seen as fiction or not. It was, however, our experience of them as fiction that shaped our understanding. When I attended to Catrina's version of the stories she was telling they were based on her reality and not a reality that was so far fetched as to be one of fantasy. In Lian's desire to have Catrina read *Awake and Dreaming* she was basing her decision on her perception of Catrina, rather than Catrina's story to live by. When I talked with Lian later in the year about the convenience store episode we discussed how Leo had scaffolded a shift in Catrina's story to live by,

> Shaun: Because in a sense you could say that Leo scaffolded an experience for Catrina when he sort of ditched her over the …
>
> Lian: Yeah well that's my fault too.
>
> Shaun: Convenience store.
>
> Lian: Um (taped conversation, May 15, 2003)

In her willingness to understand her role in the convenience store story Lian accepted the fallibility of her knowledge of Catrina. In our work together, and with the support of Catrina, Lian and I scaffolded a different story to live by in relation to the stories of Catrina.

In this narrative account of Catrina I have written about some of the various knowledges she uses in school. While this is by no means a definitive account of the knowledges she uses in her interactions in school, it highlights the ways narrative, nested, practical, and relational knowledge position her on a school landscape and influence her story to live by in school. Catrina helped me begin to understand the ways in which privileging stories influenced my understanding of the lives of children and shaped my nested knowledge of them in school. Her complex way of talking about a reality I easily identified with and a reality I struggled to understand helped me think about the role of fiction in the lives of people and how the use of fiction might help maintain the narrative coherence in our stories to live by.

CHAPTER FIVE

Leo

Leo's manners

The two of us are shy. I am shy because I feel like I am prying. Leo is shy because I am an adult and mostly a stranger. Our conversation begins with what I know about him from what he has written. The class has been asked to fill in a form that tells the teacher, Lian, things they know about themselves in school. The sheet is called, "Skills for School Success." It has a series of questions. Leo writes in what I will come to see as a way he speaks, with a straight forwardness that still manages to convey a sense of hesitation. The hesitation seems to speak of respect and manners. When asked to use two words to describe himself as a student in the classroom his responses are *kind* and *different*. From watching him in class he is indeed both of these things. What makes him different in my eyes is his watchful quietness.

As I read on in the sheet I encounter statements that wrap themselves up in a ball of emotion in my stomach. To the questions, "Are you respectful to your classmates and teachers? Are you kind and polite to others?" he answers, *yes because I learnt a quiet student is a better student*. A subsequent question asks, "Are you a good listener?" and his answer, *Yes I do good at being a listener because not many people think of me*. Which is followed by, "Do you work well independently? (do you work well without someone watching over you?)" answered with, *I am a better introvert then a extrovert*.

As I reread these questions and answers as I review our initial conversation transcripts I am struck by how Leo stories himself. It is not the story I tell of him after working with him over the past school year, but his words are there to remind me of how we began. We began, in our first conversation, to talk of who he was in school. As I write I am reminded of his tension, his nervousness at my questions. I imagine how intense it must be for him to have this focused attention on him as I recall moments when I have been the focus of someone else's attention and questions.

I started by eliciting a history of his life at school where I discovered that he has always attended this school. Lian was his teacher in Grade 5 as well as this year in Grade 6. Their history, unlike some of the children in the class, was only this long in terms of student and teacher. We talked of his work in Grade 6. Lian had told me how much better he was doing this year and Leo agreed with her. He could not pinpoint the reasons for the difference in his work this year. He responded that it was different this year, "Ever since Grade 6 it's been this way," he told me. When I asked him how it was different he told me, "You go up to Grade 7 next year." Then in response to my "Mmmhmm" he told me, "You do a lot more things, you have a lot more tests but it seems easier." This was the extent of our conversation about his work this year. We talked of teasing and how he tried to help Catrina understand what to do when Dylan teased her and then I asked him about the Skills for School Success. When I asked him about the two words he had chosen he said, "One was kind and I forget the other one." I reminded him of the other and then asked him why he chose the word kind and he responded, "Because I am." When I asked him if he chose to be kind or if he just was kind he said, "I just am." And it is true; he just is kind.

At this point my line of questions was making him upset. He frequently rubbed at his eyes and I began to regret my intensity and worried that I was harming our relationship in this initial meeting. I scrambled to think of a different line of conversation so I asked him what his favourite thing was in class and he told me it was drawing. This was the door I had been looking for because he began to tell me of the importance of art and craft in his life. He relaxed and so did I, but I was vigilant. I was learning how to be a researcher. I was learning that I had to find the kind path in the conversation with my participants. Leo was teaching me about manners in our conversation.

In a much later conversation Leo named himself as Native. He did not make this knowledge public because he might be teased about it. While he may not talk about this aloud to his classmates, he talked to me about many things that I attribute to this defining aspect of his life. In that first conversation, as we moved away from the tense conversation about who he was in school, he told me about the bead work he did, the dreamcatchers he made, he explained what a medicine bag was to me, and talked about medicinal plants. His teacher in this, he told me, was his mother, a talented craftswoman. It was from her, and his father, that he gets his politeness as he told me,

> Shaun: No? I do because I've noticed you. I've noticed how polite you are and how thoughtful. It's true. Don't give me that look. It is true. Yeah you can laugh but it's true. You bring things for your teacher, you're polite to the other kids, you're polite to me, you're respectful, you watch people, you watch the other teachers, you pay attention. Like where did you learn all those things?

Leo: Respect was from my brothers.

Shaun: Yeah?

Leo: Um, I don't know where I got the polite from but that's probably in my blood from my mom.

Shaun: Yeah?

Leo: And dad. (taped conversation, December 6, 2002)

I wondered as I listened to Leo talk if, as the year progressed, I would learn about school from him by his not talking about school. The conversation we had was all about learning and knowing and none of it was about learning and knowing in school. We ended this conversation in order for him to return to class. However, we missed the transition into a new room and so we stood there talking about life in school and he found himself in the big school photograph that was hanging in the hall. Then as we stood we saw a staff member go by and he called her strict. Another staff member passed us and he called her kind. This naming of people as either strict or kind intrigued me. We returned to the class and resumed our conversation, the focus of which was about kind and strict people. Sloughboy helped me understand Leo.

Sloughboy and Leo

It is dusk in the slough ... that in between time when vision shifts and becomes less clear. At this time vision unclear finds it hard to discern places and

people. That is why Sloughboy wonders how long the boy has been standing there in the twilight. He is quiet. He waits for recognition before entering the slough.

Sloughboy steps out of the shadows. If this new boy is startled he does not let on. Rather he looks at Sloughboy in an unfathomable manner. Sloughboy wonders at this silent regard. He looks down and sees in the boy's hand the twining of grass into a shape of some sort. The boy's fingers twitch at Sloughboy's regard. Now Sloughboy can taste defiance in the air, but he chooses to disregard it. This taste is new. He first met it in Ghost-girl-who-knows. Her defiance was not directed at Sloughboy but rather in the ways that we are named.

The boy's defiance is an act of you cannot hurt me if I am not here. Now Sloughboy understands why he has come to the slough at twilight. He is stepping between worlds, not into them. But like his presence his defiance is quiet, hidden, he will keep this to himself. The boy's name remains hidden and Sloughboy knows that it will appear in time.

Who are you? asks the boy.

Sloughboy.

What are you doing here?

This is where I live.

Where is your house?

Sloughboy sweeps his arm behind him to encompass the slough. Meaning this place, all of it is my house. Sloughboy is struck by a thought and speaks it out loud.

I can see you because you are here in this place and I am looking.

All of me?

That which is in front of me, says Sloughboy. And then just as quick he looks sideways and sees that there is much, much more to see in this boy. But he is not quick enough and the other boy sees him look sideways. The boy recognizes the ways of a sideways watcher and nods. And his eyes begin to make water.

Sloughboy knows that from too much of being seen one can feel this way. He recalls seeing this and knowing it when he watched woman-who-was-sick die in the woods. He remembers her watching him and knowing that he was in a place of loss. Alone in his knowledge would have left him dry ... sideways watching made him know she knew and his tears mixed with hers as she passed while not wanting to pass.

He understands that this boy who does not want to be seen wants to be seen. Sloughboy makes tears in his own eyes. Red faced the other boy stops his tears. He holds them back in this place of not knowing. Sloughboy's fall however.

Show me how you made that shape with the grass, he asks.

So they sit and Sloughboy watches Boy-who-would-be-seen twist and fold grass into a shape. Then Sloughboy tries and fails. He is laughed at by Boy-who-

would-be-seen for his clumsiness. Somehow Sloughboy knows this is not mocking laughter, but recognition laughter. Sloughboy smiles back.

Can I show you a dance? asks Boy-who-would-be-seen.

Yes.

So Boy-who-would-be-seen stands and begins a dance, which flattens grass.

This is the grass dance, says Boy-who-would-be-seen, the grass dancers dance first to make a space for the other dancers. Boy-who-would-be-seen dances and dances. Haltingly, Sloughboy joins him.

If my dad were here he would beat the drum to give us a rhythm to dance to, but Boy-who-would-be-seen seemed to need no drum beat as he danced a circle into the grass. Then he stopped, panting and said now we dance in a circle and they did. Shuffling in a circle for what seemed like hours. Sloughboy's knees and legs began to ache, but he chose to ignore them. Finally, the boy stopped dancing. He laughed. My mom can do this dance but it kills her legs when she does it. When we dance the circle dance we do it for hours.

They sat in the centre of the circle and talked. Around him the grass lay flat. Sloughboy wondered what the grass thought of this dance. He would have to remember to ask later. The two sat in the deepening dark and Boy-who-would-be-seen told Sloughboy a story of people who hungered for power in the world where power was there to be taken. This story he told Sloughboy is a story I heard from *my mother and by watching sideways I have come to know it is true. My mother has taught me the trick of looking sideways and in the places where I live it is a handy tool. You can see many things looking sideways. There are those people in the world who are strict and those who are kind and you can see them in this way.*

Sloughboy had never thought in this manner before. Who did he know whom these things could be said of in his world? All he knew were his companions.

The people, who are strict, continued Boy-who-would-be-seen, are those people who are kind of mad and in between … they want this stuff done, this stuff done, and then another few things done at once. Sloughboy could hear the demands of these people in the voice of Boy-who-would-be-seen.

Then there are the kind dwellers.

Kind dwellers? asked Sloughboy.

Yes, those people who are mostly kind all the time. To dwell means to live in a place that is dark and damp. The people who live in this place, the kind dwellers, are adventurous. I have known kind dwellers because of their art or interests. This makes them kind and not strict. They are nice.

Sloughboy lay down to think about the words he was hearing. Of course he wondered what he would be … strict or a kind dweller. Certainly the place he lived in was damp and now, as the sun moved out of the sky, it was dark. Sloughboy loved to swim in the dark water of the slough. Sinking into its murk he would close his eyes *and hang suspended in the dank, dark water. Over the surface of his skin he would feel the scurrying of the creatures with which he swam. Floating to the surface he would open his eyes, either to the darkness of night or the blue of day.*

Now the boy was hardly visible in the dark across from him in the circle of grass. I should go said Boy-who-would-be-seen. My mother will be worried. He stood and left. I will come back again. I like this place.

That night Sloughboy slept in the circle of grass. Everyday he did the grass dance and practiced the circle dance. In this way the space would be there for the boy when he returned.

What Sloughboy and Leo teach me

In this Sloughboy story I see much of my relationship with Leo and what I have learned from him thus far in our relationship. We have talked, as we did in the taped conversation, about making and dancing. In our taped conversation I asked him what he learned at his dance society and he said not much, all they do is dance. But later he told me about the different dances and the one, the grass dance, he dances the most. Leo has taught me to be careful of where I try to lead a conversation. Talking to him has made me more cautious, a good lesson for me to know. Like all of the children he is teaching me to pay attention and that understanding is not easy. Understanding is not easy because Leo, like all of the participants, like me, talks around ideas and topics.

How can I understand school from a conversation not about school? A voice in me says it is significant because we sit in the space in the school and we do not talk about school as much as I try. Does this mean school is not important to Leo? Not at all. Can it mean that school is a place of tension for Leo? I think the answer is yes.

Leo wakes me up: Attending to relational knowledge

We were talking. Leo was teaching me many things. He was teaching me manners. He was teaching me to pay attention. He was teaching me to be awake. This being awake was about being awake to he is, and subsequently who the other children are, and he was teaching me to be awake to who I am. Here was a story of Leo teaching me to be awake to my own story and to what I think is the answer to the question in my story.

As a teacher, one of the things I have long wondered about is our desire as educators to get children to ask more questions. I have noticed, particularly when we have a guest speaker, that when they are done talking we ask if there are any questions. We remind them, especially young children, to ask only questions, not tell stories of their own. Many of the children work hard to do as we ask, but inevitably one will start with, "My dad … " or "I have a dog … " and we quickly intercede to redirect and remind them to ask their question and to shift their attempts to build a relationship with the person who had spoken by sharing stories. I began to ask the children with whom I was working in this inquiry about this way of making sense with a story. When I did this with Leo he not only answered my query with a story, but then he taught me about how I think about these stories. In this moment of research I began by telling Leo how he told good stories. I reminded him of a story he told me of gathering plants in the forest and how he learned about this from his mother. I told him that I think he often used a story to explain something. I asked him if he agreed with this observation and he did. So I posed my question about telling stories to guests in the classroom rather than asking questions. As I set this up I paused and he was able to fill in the blanks. The transcripts represented this well,

> Shaun: OK. So here's my story and I noticed this about little kids more than I notice it about big kids so it's a little bit of memory work for you and then it's some thinking about why it happens. OK. When a guest comes to a classroom and talks after the guest is finished talking the teacher says to the class, does anybody have any
>
> Leo: Questions.
>
> Shaun: Questions. And a couple of kids ask some questions but there's always some kids who put their hand up and they tell a
>
> Leo: Story.
>
> Shaun: Story. Do you know that, do you know about that? So instead of asking a question those kids tell a story. And what does the teacher usually say to that kid?
>
> Leo: Um,

Shaun: Well my experience is that they always say, "No, no, no. We only want questions." Right, no stories. So why do those kids tell a story instead of asking a question in the first place?

Leo: Because they have a pictographic memory of what they did.

Shaun: Mmmhmm. So why do they tell that story to that person?

Leo: Because it's on topic and it's usually a good story.

Shaun: And what makes it a good story?

Leo: Like the experience they had doing it.

Shaun: Tell me some more about that. What do you mean? (taped conversation, April 10, 2003)

Leo demonstrated in the above piece of conversation an understanding of what I was asking. He was able to end my sentences and offer quickly an idea of why this might be, namely because the topic interested the children, it was a good story, they had an experience they want to share, and most interesting to me, "they have a pictographic memory of what they did." To me this meant you hear and it fills you with knowledge. What happened next in our conversation on that April day was Leo told me a story. Sloughboy helped me understand this and provided a space for Leo the storyteller.

Sloughboy and he who dances

This is a story for dusk says Boy-who-would-be-seen. Hmm thinks Sloughboy to himself, while inside he jumps a mile at being surprised by his friend.

You are a quiet walker he tells Boy-who-would-be-seen.

Boy-who-would-be-seen smiles his smile and agrees as he chuckles. Boy-who-would-be-seen knows what he has done; he had planned it that way. He teaches Sloughboy a lesson in that the boy knows now that he is not always so aware of what is going on in the slough and a guest can surprise you if they plan it.

Why is it a story for dusk? asks Sloughboy.

Because when the sun is going down you are able to listen better and therefore imagine a place you are not in because you cannot easily see where you are at the moment. It is a good space in which to tell and hear a story.

This makes sense to Sloughboy and so he makes himself comfortable for a story from Boy-who-would-be-seen. He has come to love the stories of this friend. He learns new things as he always does and comes away thinking many things.

Once, when I was away from my family on a camping trip I woke up in the night. Unable to sleep, I decided to go for a walk without any light to help me. I was able to find my way without any trouble and eventually I found a cave where a bear was asleep. For some reason I was not afraid. I stepped into the cave and began to pet the bear. It was a good place to be, the bear was warm and so, for a while, I fell asleep. When I woke up the bear was also awake. Still I was not afraid and neither was the bear. I knew the bear was not afraid or mad because of its posture. Through its body the bear told me I had been kind as I petted it and so I could *come back anytime. This was the message on its face. But one never knows with a bear and so when I left the cave I made sure I had the meat from dinner the night before in my pocket. One should always be prepared to make a gift to a stranger. So I took out the meat, giving it to the bear and petted him one last time.*

Sloughboy recalled the first time they had met and the gift Boy-who-would-be-seen had given him of the circle. The circle was still there because Sloughboy had learned that dancing was a way of telling a story. It also helped him think of the slough as a place of stories and as his friends returned often with stories it was becoming the way he understood them.

Boy-who-would-be-seen continued his story. I left the cave and continued to walk. I had not been asleep for as long as I thought. It was still dark and the sun was nowhere in the edge of the dark sky. On the way to the bear's cave I had walked past a den of wolves. I thought I was going to miss them on my walk back but I was wrong. I stepped right into their den and they saw me. I knew I was in trouble. I thought to myself "bad timing" and I stepped away from them speaking in my language saying, "see ya."

What language, Sloughboy asks.

My language, Cree.

How do you say see ya in Cree?

Actually I did not say "see ya" I actually said "awas" which in Cree means, "go away." But they didn't and so I began to walk away backwards. I remembered from my walk that there was a tree behind me and I thought if I could get to it I would be able to climb it backwards. I did not want to turn around because I knew that one should always face their danger. I knew that around me were the dens of other animals. Close by were fox, badger, and wolverine. The tree was about two metres behind me and the wolves were following me. I grabbed the bottom branches, kicked off the ground and flipped up into the tree; literally I was upside down. I climb to the top of the tree knowing I have a long wait ahead of me until my travelling friends wake up and discover I am gone. I wait. The sun is beginning to move into the sky. I get tired of waiting to be rescued and decide to get away. The wolves that have been at the bottom of the tree begin to leave, thinking there must be easier prey somewhere else. They are leaving and so to thank them for going and to speed them on their way I throw down the gift of meat. For them however, it is raw meat and I throw it close to the dens of fox and badger. This gives me time to get away and I do.

You are brave, Sloughboy says.

Boy-who-would-be-seen nods.

You know many things, says Sloughboy. This is an important story.

I think so, says Boy-who-would-be-seen. I faced fear when I went toward those wolves and the bear.

Sloughboy tells Boy-who-would-be-seen how much he likes this story. It is a good story to tell. And you were right to tell it in the dusk. As you spoke I left the slough and walked beside you in your story and now that you are done, the world of the slough has gone and we are somewhere in between the place of trees, dens, and cave, and the slough where we started. You made me leave my skin.

Boy-who-would-be-seen nods. I know about leaving your skin he says. Once, I dreamt I was bear. In this dream I had the same story, but instead of being boy walking I was the sleeping bear. I was in my skin of bear sleeping in my cave when the boy came in and touched me before going to sleep. This dream helped me see the story from the bear's point of view. All the same things happened but the dream made me look through the eyes of the bear that I slept by.

Boy-who-would-be-seen has told Sloughboy many things this dusky time of day. He has taken him away and brought him back. He has told him a story and a dream. Both these things together are powerful.

We should dance now, says Boy-who-would-be-seen.

And the two boys walk to the circle and dance. You cannot see them because it is dark, but do not doubt it.

When I woke up

I had the experience of chagrin in this research moment with Leo. The Sloughboy story Leo told was based on his actual words from a conversation we had in April. I used Sloughboy in order to tell it in the fashion of story, rather than pieces of transcript. What happened, however, at the end of Leo's story was that I asked if it was real or a dream. I do not think Leo got the gist of my question because he then recounted the dream of being bear. I was spared by his kindness of seeing things in a different way. I, however, heard what I was asking and I was asking if this was truth or fiction. In retrospect I was ashamed of my question. I was ashamed, but I found forgiveness in Leo's example of good manners.

In this research moment I woke up to my ways of thinking about truth and fiction. This helped me understand that I did not need to make so certain a distinction. Leo helped me understand the other children with whom I work. He helped me to see that a story was a way of making sense. When I asked him if this was an important story to him he replied "kind of, but I haven't told anyone but you." He honoured me with this statement. He told me it was important because in it he had faced fear. When I asked him what the story told him his response was typical Leo, "I don't know. Some strange story." In some ways it was hard for me to imagine a 12-year-old boy living within the ambiguity this response indicated, but Leo was comfortable with ambiguity. It was a way, I think, that he made sense of many things. It was a way of living with knowing in relationship, rather than authority.

I wondered if this had something to do with the absence of school stories in my conversations with Leo. Earlier, I wondered if I would learn of school from Leo by the stories he told or the ones he did not tell. This wonder returned me to the idea of being in relationship with knowledge. When Leo talked about the people who were kind or strict I understood him to be talking about people who were in relationship with what they did in school. Mrs. Paul, the librarian, was kind because of her work with books. Mrs. Nelson was kind because of her art, and Ms. Elliot because of physical education. All of these people were in relationship with what they knew because they liked it and somehow communicated that to Leo. People in the school in positions of authority like the principal and the vice principal were seen as strict. When we talked, Leo did not talk of them being in relationship with anything. He did not know, for example, that the principal loved books and had an extensive collection of picture books. These picture books helped her imagine ways to communicate ideas and share with others. I wondered if Leo had known this, if he would have named her as kind.

When I asked Leo why he had no stories of school he told me that if he had them they would "turn out boring" because they would be based on the "basic old same routine almost every day" and "what would I need to tell you? You could probably figure it out." When I jokingly said, "no, I'm not very smart" hoping he would say more, he told me "you have insulted yourself." He was right. I would never say this, even jokingly, to another person and once again it pointed to an authority dynamic with knowledge. I indicated I did not know something in order for him to teach me. He had, throughout this part of the conversation, told me that I already knew about school and why would he need to remind me. He was right. From watching Leo I had a sense of his story in school and I should not have insulted myself.

Pursuing the idea of story in school I shifted the focus from his story of school to Ms. Elliot's use of personal stories in school. Ms. Elliot always started Monday mornings with everyone sharing stories of their weekend. Many children in the class participated in this Monday routine. When I asked Leo what function it served he told me it "helps her out" and "it shows you what she does and what you do." He told me by using this routine "she gets to know them better so she knows .... which class they should go in next year and it helps her out with a lot of things." For Leo, this activity helped Lian know the children, but it also aided her in her work as a teacher. Leo saw this as knowledge in the aid of relationship. It was the same for Lian, and as an observer in this classroom, I saw that he was right.

Being invisible in relationship: A way of thinking about nested knowledge

Talking to Leo and thinking about his observations should indicate that this boy is centred in relationships in the class. Rather, Leo, was a watcher in this classroom. He did not draw attention to himself and it was only by knowing him over time that I believe we began to have the conversations that occurred. In class he was quiet. In group work he was a follower, not a leader. In a project review activity he named himself as "worker" along with Barb, a fellow student he had named earlier as one of the kind members of the class. The other people in his group, one of whom was Erica, he called "Boss" and Carson he named as "co-Boss." In this reflective activity about group work he commented that he and Barb were not very involved in the project. He wrote in response to questions, "Barb and I weren't giving many ideas because Erica and Carson took over the project mostly. We didn't [listen to each other] because Barb and I were playing a game because we weren't asked to do much. We didn't encourage each other because Barb and I were over on the couch wall and Erica and Carson were doing the work. We did not [build on each other's ideas] much because constantly Erica and Carson were the bosses" (student writing, October 1, 2002).

For Leo, this activity was all about not being in relationship with the group except for Barb. He wrote he had done little in this project and by reading what he had written he showed that this was in part because of the dominance of the group by two of its members. In a found poem he wrote, using the words from his November report card, Leo showed what was important to him in the words of his teacher,

> Leo is a kind member
> respect to classmates and
> teachers and work meets
> standard of excellence.
> He is very hardstruck on his work.
> I am an excellent standard. (student work, December 12, 2002)

Nowhere in the report card was the word hardstruck and it was an intriguing word. Leo had made a decision this year to do well in school. Perhaps he had chosen this word to describe his choice of focus. I am more captivated, however, by what he had chosen as significant. His poem is about relationship and, in describing how he was with others, he appropriated the language of assessment in this school and indicated his excellence. He went so far as to objectify this by writing "I am an excellent standard." I liked this statement, because it was not in keeping with the humble persona he projected in school. It pointed out the complexity of who he was at school.

To give a contrasting note to Leo's standard of excellence, in our conversation in April about stories, I told him a story of my dislike of gatherings where I don't know anyone. He, however, liked this, 'because it's easier for them to not pay attention to you." Was this because it was easier to watch when no one was watching you? Leo had given me a new way to be when I was out in the world. He showed me that you could be in relationship and be invisible. This made me wonder about how I understood relationship. It made me wonder about how we know others and subsequently know ourselves.

Leo and nested knowledge

"Because she wanted us to know because she thought we didn't know."

(Leo, taped conversation, February 18, 2003)

Like all of us, Leo had a sense of what other people thought of him. Often in our conversations he would talk about how he felt the things people did made no sense in the context of his or other children's lives in school. In one example he talked about a reward system one teacher used with his Grade 5/6 class. He thought it was "dumb." Talking to other children in the class I found this was the general consensus. For Leo it was not just dumb because of the simplistic nature of the system, but because the reward at the end was of no importance to him. As well, he saw the flaws in the system. To get this party, the reward that he saw no one wanting, you needed 25 happy faces. During the year they had reached that many happy faces and no party. He saw the system for what it is, a way of controlling behaviour in the class. He also recognized the limitations of the system, because it only took a couple of children to mess it up for the rest of them. Leo saw that this teacher did not know what the children knew, that is, that they were being manipulated into good behaviour and they were not interested. The subject this teacher instructed is one he liked the previous year with a different teacher, but now, he had no pleasure in it. His relationship with this teacher affected his knowledge of the subject.

Talking about how Lian knew him he responded quickly that she knew he liked art. Exploring this subject further when I asked what did Lian know about how he learned, he told me that she might not know that much because in the past he never got his homework done. However, this year he was doing better with it. He told me it was done "on time" and this indicated to me Leo's understanding of the importance of homework in the life of school and his supposition of the value teachers place in it. I surmised that this was important to Leo because of his history of not doing homework and the consequences he faced because of this behaviour. It was interesting to consider, in this initial conversation about how teachers know him, he used homework as an example. Pursuing this further he did say that the most important thing to Lian would be for him "to learn."

When I asked him how Lian gave them feedback about their learning, he told me she did it in places like class meetings where in the past she had told them "everyone can learn." Trying to build on this I asked him what he knew about himself. This was a difficult question for him as it was for all the children in the inquiry. We talked some more and I used a story to illustrate what I was asking and he told me he knew he did not like to be interrupted. His examples of being interrupted were in art and homework. I found, as Leo and I talked, that this idea of what he knew about himself in relation to his learning was one he was not clear about. Leo gave me a clear sense of the complexity of what I was asking him to describe in his inability to name what he knew about himself as a learner, or a knower. Naming the influence of nested knowledge in his story to live by in school was difficult.

Our conversation shifted and we began to talk about life outside of school. Here he told me about his involvement in Junior Forest Wardens and the White Buffalo Dancers and Drummers Society. In these two places his knowledge was about doing and not, in the way he described it, about the nested relationship of teachers and students knowing each other. In our conversation about school, as I asked him about nested knowledge, I carried the conversation. I gave long examples in order to elicit a response. However, when we talked about his life outside of school, the conversation became more balanced and in these places I responded to his comments. In these places he was in control of the flow of conversation. In our nested relationship I knew that Leo liked to talk about his life outside of school. I knew that he became more comfortable, he relaxed, became more certain and here I realized with Leo it was our relationship, rather than in his understanding of a relationship in school, where I was to find the ways I needed to think about nested knowledge.

Looking for examples of nested knowledge I reread the transcripts, field notes, and Leo's written work samples. Throughout these there was little direct response to my wonder about nested knowledge in his life at school. However, I began to see that Leo saw himself as invisible in this kind of relationship. When I asked him if there was something that was hard for him to do he told me, "Get people's attention." Exploring this the following piece of conversation occurred,

> Shaun: Yeah. And what about getting someone's attention at school?
>
> Leo: That's harder to do.
>
> Shaun: Why?
>
> Leo: Because usually nobody pays attention.
>
> Shaun: How come?
>
> Leo: I don't know. Maybe it's because of my personality or something. I don't know. (taped conversation, December 6, 2003)

My wonder was if you consider yourself invisible, how do you see yourself in a nested relationship? When I talked to Lian about Leo she did not find him invisible. She worked hard to understand him in the context of school. She had a good relationship with his mother who gave her many gifts. She recognized the importance of his relationship with his mother in relation to his understanding of school. As a knower knowing a knower, she knew some of his story of school and his wish to do better in this last year of elementary school. She knew about his trouble with homework and different subjects. However, he was also a puzzle to her and I wondered if this was not a reflection of his wish to not be so noticed.

Shaun: Now what about Leo?

Lian: Yeah … to do well with. And so we've, with him to help him with his story you do little things like tailor, you know like the normal curriculum and tailoring, you do less questions, you know that kind of stuff. So you watch him. Like he's, he'll stop. He'll physically stop doing what he's doing and do nothing.

Shaun: And then what do you do?

Lian: In math class he, he'll stop. And ah, well then you just go and find out why he stopped … Um he's come a long ways. The other way, you know last year was that no assignments handed in, sick on a day of tests, ah, excuses, you know all that kind of stuff, missing days. He's doing his homework. He's doing it now … I don't know what's made that improvement. But ah, he, you just have to watch. You have to watch him. He doesn't talk.

Shaun: No.

Lian: to me about it.

Shaun: No. I don't think he talks about …

Lian: So it's not a communication thing that I've learned from him, how he copes with school. It's an observation I think more than anything … he's a puzzle. He's a tough one to think about … he will remain a puzzle and I don't know what junior high will do with, like I don't know how he'll ….it's going to be very difficult for him, the structured, the late policies, the absent policy, the tests, the … homework, the, you know, assignment

> policies. It's going to be very difficult because I've been lenient with him because, you know, you mean he's got to stay for recess and all that because … assignments are done. (taped conversation, March 7, 2003)

Lian also spoke of the importance of Leo's family culture in order to understand who he was at school. In our conversation there were elements of respect and the wish to know more. She highlighted the importance of Leo's mother and her admiration for her. She also told me that she knew that Leo's mother attended a residential school[4] and she wondered how much that affected her trust of a school system and what that meant for Leo. She drew parallels between her understanding of school and Leo's. She did not say she understood Leo's knowledge of school through his mother's experience. Rather, as a child of teachers, Lian showed that what she knew of school was heavily influenced by her family culture and she imagined it to be the same for Leo. This was a significant piece of nested knowledge. It indicated that Leo was not as invisible or inconsequential as he might think himself. In the community of the classroom Lian thought about him often and knew about his ability to quietly slip from view. She knew she needed to be attentive to this skill and respond to it in ways that helped him remain connected to school. In our conversation there was also the element of concern, concern for this boy in an environment where she wondered about the depth of nested knowledge in a junior high system of different teachers for different subjects and policies that do not account for knowing the individual.

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[4] Residential schools were schools where Aboriginal children were sent after being removed from their families, against the wishes of their parents. Residential schools were not schools that respected the traditional ways of the Aboriginal people and were highly detrimental to the lives of the children and their community. Residential schools played a role in the breakdown of Aboriginal culture.

Leo's narrative knowledge of self

When I asked Leo to tell me who he was in school he began with a physical description of himself. He told me he thought others would think he was big because he was the tallest person in class. He liked being tall because other people had to look up at him and that gave him a sense of power. It meant that they wouldn't try and mess with him. He pointed out in this conversation though that it was important not to fight. He had learned this from his family.

We talked about the White Buffalo Dancers and Drummers Society and this led me to ask if he called himself Native. His response was affirmative.

> Shaun: Mmmhmm. So do you call yourself a Native kid?
>
> Leo: Mmm
>
> Shaun: Is that what you would say you are?
>
> Leo: Yeah but almost nobody knows that I am Native.
>
> Shaun: Yeah ... why don't they know that you are Native?
>
> Leo: Because I don't make it public ... because I don't like racist people. (taped conversation, May 20, 2003)

At school his perception was that most people did not think he was Native. He did name other children in the class who were also Native. He recognized Dylan as Cree when he started school. He told me he could tell Dylan was Cree just from watching him. He also named Cheyenne as Native. Throughout our conversations different topics arose where he talked about Native culture. His references to the dance society and being a grass dancer and the powwows he attends in the summer, to his mother's knowledge of plants and how he has learned about them from her when they go out to collect them, to the dreamcatchers he has learned to make from his mother, to the bead work he does, to his explanation of medicine bags were all ways he talked about being Native. When I asked him to give me words that I could use to describe him in a story he said, "I'd probably twist you up in words" (taped conversation, May 20, 2003). I think, in this passage, Leo meant he could hide, he could be invisible.

He told me he was big and thought of himself as a person who kept the peace. He liked being out of school because he was able to do anything he wanted. He liked fantasy books because they offered him "a different point of view." He liked to play soccer and then, in this conversation, we talked again about the dance society where people would know he was Native "from one look at my mom." At school "everyone thinks that my mom is just tanned." Leo's story of himself moved in and out of many plotlines.

This year at school he had a different story of who he was as a student. He had more success this year. He accomplished more because he wanted to be ready for junior high. Throughout much of the year he kept a thick fantasy novel on his desk. He began half way through the year to wear his hair in a ponytail. He liked many of the people in his class, particularly those he named as kind dwellers. Often they were people with whom he has been in more than one grade and he talked about Krista and Barb as being two people he enjoyed spending time with in school. In a journal and subsequent poem he talked about a girl with whom he had a negative experience.

The class had a new seating plan and Lian and I had asked them to keep a journal of their week. These journals would be used as the basis for writing poems the next week.

Leo wrote of his experience with Hailey. Leo's poem captured the essence of the journal entry.

Monday, March 3, 2003

After I got seated
in my desk after we
changed where we were
sitting. Hailey started
in on me.

And she got totally vicious
took one look and told
me don't talk to me and don't
stare at me.

Me I almost chuckled
it was so funny. My face
was so red I looked like
a cherry!! (student work, March 3, 2003)

In his journal he then recounted a moment in the next day when he joined Hailey and Serena in a conversation. Once again Hailey dropped the conversation and repeated her actions from the day before. Leo wrote, "[She] does the same thing she did yesterday.

She [is] vicious and mean, so to my astonishment I said to myself I don't need this this early in the morning so 'be quiet because you are annoying and very irritating' and that's what I said. Of course no more words peeping out of her mouth for a good hour." Interestingly he ended this entry, which is about people being disrespectful with the line, "On the air I smell a faint perfume" (writing activity, March 4, 2003). Leo had talked to me before about not fighting and in this exchange he did not fight. He was confused and eventually he made his feelings known, but he remained peaceful.

Tension and authority

Throughout our conversations Leo and I had talked about the authority figures in school. One of the ways Leo knew himself at school was through his interactions with others. There was a nested dimension to this, but it resided more in the dimension of relational knowledge. These people shaped his knowing in school. Earlier I wrote of how Leo named people as strict or kind dwellers. He applied this to adults and children in the school. We talked a lot about kind dwellers, but in our conversations we also talked about the people who were strict. In the last section I described Leo's difficult time with Hailey, his new seating partner. He tried to ignore her bad manners to start with, but eventually confronted her when she continued to be rude to him. It was evident in Leo's words that he wished to be surrounded by kind dwellers. He wanted his community to consist of kind dwellers. I think Leo was telling me this was how he learned the best, in the place of kind dwellers.

Sometimes our conversation wove in and out of his relationship with the principal. This relationship, for Leo, was not without tension. When Leo talked about kind dwellers he located them within his sense of their relationship with what they hold important and also in relationship with himself. With the principal there was a lack of relationship and therefore it was a place of tension. This did not mean Leo was in conflict with the principal; neither one of them led a life of conflict with the other. Leo, however, talked often of the tensions he felt around her.

On the day of his encounter with Hailey he also had an encounter with the principal at a senior assembly. He told me he was sitting in the front of the area, evidently in view of the principal who was talking to the group. Initially he was playing with his pencil, which he was asked to put away. He did this by sliding it under his Velcro watchband. As he put his pencil under it he noticed his watch was upside down. So he began to take off his watch, but slowly because the Velcro made a sound as he undid the band. The principal caught his eye as he did it and at one point told him how many times she had reprimanded him about his behaviour. She stopped what she was doing at one point because of the noise he was making and, when she returned to the role-play she was doing with the librarian, she had to be reminded of where she was in the skit. Finally when they were done Leo ripped the rest of the watchband apart. The principal stared at him, looking very annoyed and he tried to ignore her and returned to class. When I asked him if he had experienced her being annoyed with him before he told me "yes," in her office the odd time he had been in trouble.

I wondered out loud if this was the only time he has been in tension with authority at school and he told me no. He had almost had his bike taken away before for riding it on school grounds when he was younger, and from what he said, I thought he had been in the office to talk about a conflict with another student. Part of his tension stemmed from his different views of what worked at school and what didn't. As I listened to Leo I tried to understand what he was saying in the context of how I knew the principal and what I knew about school from my own long experience with it. He recounted a story of a fundraiser at school and the principal's new vehicle. In his recollection he saw the two as somehow connected to each other. The school raised money and the principal bought a new vehicle. I attempted to explain that a principal was paid separately from the money that was used to run the school. He remained unconvinced. Leo refused to see this in another light.

He told me he didn't like long lectures, although in the following field text he described them as little talks. The tension here was the discrepancy between what were, in all likelihood, little talks and his temporal sense of them being long. He would rather just be told and perhaps given a note on his hand to remind him not to do it again. He explained,

> Leo: And she has the little dumb little talks with us after school or …
>
> Shaun: And why do you call them dumb?
>
> Leo: Because they're annoying. I don't see the point in them. Just tell us not to do it again and or give us little notes on our hands and stuff.
>
> Shaun: She puts notes on your hands or …

Leo: No.

Shaun: you wish she would.

Leo: It would be a lot more easier but …

Shaun: How come would it be easier?

Leo: Because then if you were about to push someone you would see it and stop.

Shaun: Oh.

Leo: And then you've got to read it.

Shaun: Oh OK. So you'd rather just have the short talk, get it over with rather than a long talk. So it, because …

Leo: They're really long, dumb lectures. (taped conversation, March 3, 2003)

It was evident from this exchange that Leo saw no value in the long lectures. I was not surprised by this exchange. As a teacher I was sure some of my conversations with children could certainly be seen as a "long lecture" and Leo taught me again to examine who I was in school. If I examined the idea of the "long lecture" from Leo's perspective, I began to see it as a hierarchical relation based on power. In my long conversations with children I had the power to expect them to listen and perhaps, if I think long enough about it, the power to make them. In my work with the children I was beginning to see myself in a new way. I was learning that a part of my relationship with Leo is the learning of manners and so I asked him to help me know more. I asked him what I should do if I want to be a good principal in an attempt to understand what he is trying to say from a different vantage point.

He had a number of suggestions. He reminded me again not give long boring lectures. He told me to be "kind of sarcastic to make it funny in assemblies" and to "actually know all [the students'] names and not just say, 'Whoever you are'." These statements are about being in relationship with children. He then went on to give me practical tips, telling me when I make them "do writing, actually make it fun writing." He told me that when I teach older children I should respect their intelligence and not treat them as younger children and then I asked him what I should know to teach someone like him.

> Shaun: So what should I know about the kids though? What should I know about somebody like you?
>
> Leo: A person like me would rather be working alone.
>
> Shaun: OK. So some kids need to work alone. What else should I know about you?
>
> Leo: Some kids like me like to draw.
>
> Shaun: OK so build in lots of drawing. What else?
>
> Leo: Some people like to paint, they like, some people like to play with toys which the tea[cher], the principal doesn't allow. (taped conversation, March 3, 2003)

From these suggestions I surmised that Leo did not find much opportunity for these activities in school. Leo was telling me to attend to children separately, rather than a homogeneous whole. I asked more,

> Shaun: … so what else would you tell me if I was a Grade 5/6 teacher.

Leo: Not to be strict.

Shaun: OK, I won't be strict. I'll try not to be. Can I be a little bit bossy sometimes?

Leo: Mmm you can try but I don't think they'll listen to you that much. (taped conversation, March 3, 2003)

There it was, to Leo a good teacher and a good principal was a kind dweller, an individual in relationship with children who wanted to stand among them.

In my work with Leo I learned a great deal about working with a research participant. He helped me understand our nested knowledge of each other. I wrote often about learning my manners with Leo and this was a reflection of the relational knowledge I needed to learn in order to work with Leo. Leo, like Catrina, although in a different way, helped me think about the place of fiction in our stories to live by. With Leo, as with Catrina, their nested and relational knowledge was not restricted to Lian, but involved other children and adults on the school landscape. Leo talked a lot about his family. His relational knowledge of them helped him in his story to live by in school. Leo's hesitation to talk about school initially helped me understand the place of school in his life and the tensions he experienced in school. Attending to these tensions helped me understand Leo better and live alongside him in a more relational manner.

Whispering Name

When the children come to the slough there is a whispering name that trails in after them. The grass cannot catch this name. It hovers beyond the children, but *seems to move between them. It is a way they seem to know each other. It responds not only to the way they inhabit the space but also in the way they are connected.*

This name is beyond the language of Sloughboy. It is not a name he seems to be able to hear and not one the others have spoken out loud. Rather it drifts among them moving in and out of their stories.

No one is in the slough today with Sloughboy. He sits alone. He looks at his home, his place and thinks of his new friends. He thinks of them by the places they have created in the slough. There is the circle Boy-who-would-be-seen has danced into the grass. The rock where Ghost-girl-who-knows likes to sit and watch the dancing reflection on the surface of the water. Sloughboy smiles when he thinks of Travis' hiding spot, the place where he hid, rabbit-twitchy like, waiting to be found. He thinks of the places outside the slough where he met and played and talked with One-who-stands-among and Certain-girl-shifting.

His friends have places in the slough and Sloughboy realizes that there has been something among them, some binding thing, that he can sense when they come into the slough. He senses that this something is a someone. He knows he can ask Travis. He knows that this thing, this person, will not make Travis rabbit-twitchy.

It is many days before Travis comes back to the slough, but Sloughboy, who has been busy, has not forgotten his wonder. He and Travis play a game of tag *before they begin to walk through the slough. Sloughboy is taking him to the place he first found Cravenbeast. Sloughboy does not know how to ask Travis the question he has been holding in his head. He does not know how to speak his wonder out loud. He tells Travis he does not know what he wants to say.*

Travis smiles.

He thinks it is funny the words have fallen out of Sloughboy's head. So they walk. Then Sloughboy says, Who is this thing that connects you to the others who have come to the slough?

Who are you talking about?

The others like you.

Sloughboy names them and what they like to do.

Travis names them by the names he knows, Leo, Catrina, Erica, and Cheyenne.

We go to school together.

What is a school? asks Sloughboy.

A place where we go to learn.

Sloughboy looks around the slough and wonders if he can call this place a school.

We all have the same teacher, says Travis.

This name sounds similar to the whispers Sloughboy has heard. He thinks of this strange name Same-teacher. She must be like the mud beaver uses to bind his work together, the twigs and sticks he binds to hold back water.

Is this Same-teacher like mud? he asks.

Mud? and Travis begins to laugh. He laughs so hard he has to stop walking.

She is not mud, says Travis. Why do you think she is like mud?

Sloughboy tells him about the work of beaver and the dams he builds with different materials that hold back water.

Travis is thoughtful. He thinks about Sloughboy's idea. Sloughboy knew he could ask Travis.

I know what you mean, and I see why you think of mud. I don't think she would like to be called mud, but she is the thing that all of us have in common. Some of us have known her a long time. She taught me for two years already and now again this year. I was so happy to be in her class again. I was hoping it would happen, and it did. It was a wish I had. Talking about the Woman-who-binds made Travis smile, the inward smile of that which makes us deeply happy.

Sloughboy had a sense that somehow this woman was like Cravenbeast. She had something to do with knowledge and experience. He could imagine being changed around her like he was changed by Cravenbeast. On a different level he could imagine the work of Oldest-living-life moving in and out of these people ... of *moving in and out of his friends and the Woman-who-binds. A sharing movement that changed them all and made them the same somehow. He had experienced that himself. When he first met his new friends he knew they were different, but now that difference was harder to see. It existed still, but like the places where the grass and the poplars grew together the border between their worlds was less bold.*

He wondered what it would be like to have Oldest-living-life combined with Cravenbeast. He knew it would mean something more. He loved Cravenbeast. Cravenbeast was the being he knew best in the world. What would it be like if Cravenbeast breathed? If Oldest-living-life moved out of him and into Sloughboy as he took Sloughboy places and told him things. Sloughboy thought it must be a potent combination in this woman who binds these children together. He wondered if she had magic. He had heard about magic but the only magic he had yet to experience was the new life of seasons and days and the everyday wonder around him. He thought to himself that this was a question for Ghost-girl-who-knows.

As he thought about what he had learned they neared the meeting place of boy and beast. They stepped into a place of the slough, but removed from it. A grove of birch surrounded them. Sloughboy had never heard the birch speak. They are a hard wood to understand. The wind moved their high delicate branches in ways he could not understand. The grass had nothing to say about them. They only came so far and none of the distance they covered came near to the grove. Before *you stepped into the grove, you stepped across ground where grass did not grow. Neither did the poplar speak of the birch. The ground where the birch grew was too wet for poplar. Birch stood alone. Unlike the interconnected poplar the birch were their own tree – their own root. They had their own place in the slough; they had found a place in a world usually given over to interconnectedness. In their silence the other plants were respectful.*

Sloughboy, by temperament respectful, nevertheless knew one could be respectful and playful at the same time. He loved to run in the grove and play around the trees. It was a quiet place and he also liked to come here and sleep on warm full days. He liked the feeling of being some place different while still in the slough.

This is the place where I first met Cravenbeast. I didn't see him at first because his jumbled bones looked like the paper of the birch. I think he was waiting here to be seen. Was Woman-who-binds waiting to be seen when you found her?

Travis shrugs an I don't know answer at Sloughboy. The birch grove has made him quiet. Where is Cravenbeast now?

I don't know, was Sloughboy's response, somewhere close. ***(Knowledge is always somewhere close)***

Sloughboy could see Travis liked this place.

It is so quiet and peaceful in this place, said Travis looking around and feeling the papery bark of the birch. I love peaceful places. I like to find them and spend time in them. They make me feel better, they make me feel safe, they help me to push the big stories out of my head. Travis leaned forward and rested his head on the trunk of one of the birch. Listen to how slowly they talk he whispered.

Sloughboy leaned his head on the trunk of the tree with Travis. He could hear a slow story being told. He had never heard this before. Travis was teaching him something new.

As the year progressed I became aware of a story that existed beyond my ability as a researcher to describe. Initially I thought it was the story of Lian in the slough. In the chapter on methodology I wrote about trying to create a Sloughboy story of Lian. As a story it did not work. For some reason a teacher did not make sense in the slough. However, I always felt Lian would come to the slough in some manner. In this Sloughboy story Lian did come, in a storied form, told by Travis. This Sloughboy story, like the others, was based on field texts created with the children. In this story I drew heavily on the field texts of Travis. The narrative account of Travis was the last to be written in the dissertation, but he was the first of the children to meet Sloughboy. It is a tension I cannot fully explain. Perhaps it might be best understood by thinking about my research relationship with Travis. Travis and I seemed to easily establish a relationship in the inquiry. However, he was the most elusive of the children to work with, which is a topic I explore in his narrative account.

Travis led me to the place where I was able to write about Lian. The other interesting part of the *Whispering Name* story was the presence of the birch. When I began to write the *Whispering Name* story I did not realise it would end with the birch. The birch represent a story that cannot be named or told. This was the story I could not capture in my work. The birch represent a slow story of school. As the research progressed there seemed to be something that existed beyond anyone's ability to name. It was a story that moved along, was told or enacted in some tacit manner beyond my ability to write. It seemed to reside in my subsidiary awareness (Polanyi, 1962). It was there in the corner of my eye, but when I looked at it, when I looked sideways, to borrow from Travis, it did not swing into my vision, but remained always in the corner. It had a sense of Crites' (1971) sacred story, a story that exists, according to Crites, outside of language, or in my words, our ability to tell. I call it a slow story of school because it moves so slowly as to be indiscernible and to slow one's own story enough to hear it would be impossible.

This slow story of school was a shaping story of experience. How could Travis define how Lian binds them together? He could use a mundane story (Crites, 1971) of the things Lian does in class and tell an acceptable story of her role as teacher, as the person in authority who shapes the day for her students, but there was also something else about how Lian is with the children. This way of being together, the shape of the classroom community, approached some part of the story of school, but this slow story still existed deeper, in a slower way still that was about something more than relationship, or love, or shared history. After the next chapter about Erica I return to the story of the birch because once I heard it I could not let it go.

CHAPTER SIX

Erica

Sloughboy and Erica

Swimming, Sloughboy dives deep in the water, the murk clouds his eyes, sometimes in this place it is difficult to see. Not even sideways looking can help you. Still he likes to swim in the murk, to be surprised, to rise back to the lightening surface where he breaks through into the air. When he does she is sitting on the bank watching him.

He treads in place watching her watch him. Who is this he thinks? But she is inscrutable. She betrays nothing. She does not look sideways, she looks straight ahead and in her view there is a boy, in a slough, treading water, looking at her. Sloughboy looks beyond her to see if she is alone. He has come to realize that there are many people in the world beyond his slough. People he did not know existed or know anything about their existence. Still she is silent as she sits and watches so he climbs out of the slough on the far side of the water and sits to watch her.

Is this a new game he thinks to himself as he sits watching. She blinks sometimes, but languidly, as though even that were a thought before it occurred.

Who are you? She finally speaks.

I am Sloughboy.

Did your mother give you that name?

Sloughboy thinks ... mother ... hmmm ... he does not think he has one. Maybe the woman he watched die in the poplar clearing was his mother, but she never said so. He wonders why this idea is in his head, that she who wept was his mother. He leaves that thought and returns to his naming.

No she did not, this place gave me my name.

She looks around as if to discern some agent responsible for his name. She can see nothing but the things of the slough ... water, grass, willow, different plants and small creatures.

This named you?

Sloughboy nods.

That is really strange. Where are your friends?

There is that word again. Sloughboy wonders at her questions. First a name and a question about a mother then ... who are his friends. These must be important things to her if she asks them so quickly. Really they have only known each other for no time at all.

I have no friends, he says aloud and then wonders if the new people who have been to the slough recently might be his friends. Too early to tell he decides and sticks with his first response.

Everyone has friends, she says to him.

He shrugs. How can he answer her question twice when the first answer is still the answer? So he says nothing.

Instead he asks a question, Where are your friends?

Not here, she replies. Definitely not here.

Why?

They wouldn't come here I don't think. They are in other places.

Then Sloughboy sees behind her the shifting shapes of the people who would be her friends. At least that is what he imagines the shifting images behind her to be.

Do you want a friend? she asks.

Do I need a friend?

Yes, everyone needs a friend.

Sloughboy thinks on this ... he has never felt the need before. Perhaps he does have friends if what she says is true. Certainly he enjoys the company of Coyote. He likes to ride with Cravenbeast and he feels happy in the presence of grass. Indeed when he thinks about it ... all of these are his friends because as he thinks of them he names as friends. Trickster-joker friend, knowing friend, whispering friend. All of these can be described as friends, but he needs to know more about this idea of friend. He wonders if this girl can tell him about friends.

She certainly thinks it is important. In that thought is a glimmer of who she is this certain girl shifting in front of him on the landscape of the slough.

You are Certain-girl-shifting.

She laughs and laughs and says, No she is Erica. Certainly Erica.

Sloughboy nods to indicate he has heard, but he nods to his knowing as well and she becomes fixed in his head as Certain-girl-shifting. He looks sideways at her as he has seen Travis and Boy-who would-be-seen do and sees nothing different in her. Seeing her is a straight ahead kind of seeing. She lets nothing escape from her sideways being. She is intact in front of him and he wonders at the power of this illusion in her.

They are still sitting across the water from each other. Neither of them moves. The space between them is open. They can easily see and hear each other. The water is flat and reflects some of who they are, even though its nature is murky, its surface certainly reflects. In the reflection he sees her inverted. Still ... she can be so still he thinks. To make her move he drops a stone into the water on his edge and the ripples, when they finally reach her, make her dance upon the reflection of the water. He watches her dance. When she realizes his gaze is upon the water, she asks him what he is looking at.

You, he replies.

I am here, is her response.

Yes, he nods, And you are there too and he points at the water.

She looks in the direction of where he points.

That is not me, she says, That is my reflection.

Yes, he says, And it is you too, and what is more ... now you are dancing.

This is dancing, she says and she stands and does a dance on the far side of the pool. She jumps and swings her arms and kicks her legs in the air and tosses her head back and forth. Then she falls to the ground and looks at Sloughboy.

That is dancing.

In the pool she has gone still again.

He nods. She is right and he tells her so. Yes that is dancing. Now watch.

And he drops another stone in the water and when the ripples reach her she dances again in a back and forth rocking motion.

That is dancing too. See how you move on the surface of the water? There is more than one way to dance.

OK, you've got a point, she says.

Now it is your turn to dance. She says it like it is something she has just noticed, but he realizes she means it as a command. He knows he does not have to obey and he could resist, but he is intrigued by this new person, and he does not want to disappoint her. So he stands and instead of her wild dance he spins and turns in a tight coil before throwing out his arms and leaping and tumbling and *twisting in the air as he has seen swallow do when she sails through the slough. She is one of his favourite dancers. Then he does the dance he has seen Coyote do, the leaping, flipping backwards dance he does as he imagines catching the flies buzzing around him. To end his dance he flips up into the air and falls, arms and legs wide onto the surface of the pool, sending up a great splash, which drenches Certain-shifting-girl in murky water.*

His head bobs up in time to see her hopping and brushing at the water on her. From the pool where he watches, he says ... now you are dancing in both places.

And he watches her dance the dance away from water as she dances on the surface of it. Double dancing, triple indeed as the water conspires to make her dance and dance within itself, reflecting again and again who she might be.

And he realizes he is back where he started, watching her from within the pool.

Erica and narrative knowledge

As I watched in the class taking notes I began to wonder with whom I might work over the course of the year. I was conscious of choosing a diversity of children. I also thought it would be best to choose someone who seemed comfortable with me. As I worked in the class for the first three months I was drawn to Erica. She was an assertive girl who aligned herself readily with her teacher. It was easy for Erica to work with her teacher. They had an ongoing relationship as teacher and student. Lian was Erica's teacher in Grades 2, 5, and now 6. In terms of teacher and students they went way back. Erica's mother also had a good relationship with the teacher. She volunteered often in the room, enjoyed talking with Lian, and often joined the class on fieldtrips.

Beyond the shared history both Erica and Lian were athletes. Erica described herself as sporty, a quality she admired greatly in Lian. It was obvious that Erica wished to please Lian. She worked hard, volunteered in class, helped other students, and contributed often at the beginning of the year to class discussions. As I watched Erica I was struck by her confidence. She felt comfortable talking in any situation in class and when she and I started to have conversations she was pleased to have been asked and was very willing to participate.

Lian liked to start Mondays by giving people in the class the opportunity to talk about their weekends. Children talked about outings with the parents, special events, sports they had participated in, and stories of their families or movies they had watched. Lian always told something about her weekend as well, much in the same vein as the children. Lian saw this as an important way to start the week. I noticed that often Erica's story was similar to Lian's.

The Monday morning story telling was an important part of the week for Erica. When we had a conversation, Erica was able to tell me a number of things about the Monday morning sharing. She talked about why she felt it was important to her and why she thought Lian did it. Erica loved hearing Lian's own stories. She referred to them as funny and informative. They provided Erica and the other students with insights into Lian's life.

> Shaun: And do you, why do you think she tells, because I don't think all teachers tell stories about their weekends to the kids on Monday mornings.
>
> Erica: I think she does it because she knows we work really hard and she knows we've got a big day ahead of us and so she kind of tells us the story to brighten our smile, you know.
>
> Shaun: And does it make a difference that she tells you a story?
>
> Erica: Yes it does because it just, like if she tells me something funny it'll put a smile on my face. And even if I've had a bad weekend I'll just be really happy throughout the day.
>
> Shaun: Yeah.
>
> Erica: And I'll tell the story to some of my friends. Like oh my gosh my teacher took her dog to the vet and her dog wasn't being very good. And you know it gives you something to laugh about. (taped conversation, December 6, 2002)

In this conversation, Erica made a connection between the relational and practical. These were two important aspects of school for Erica. She valued her friendships highly and wanted to do well at school. When I observed in the class on Monday mornings Erica was attentive to the morning conversation. Her hand went up quickly and would sometimes go up a second time when something reminded her of another aspect of her weekend she would like to share. By her involvement and comments, it was an important time of the week for her.

At the end of the first week of the school year, students from a room where the teacher has been surplussed were placed in Lian's room. In order for the students to know each other, Lian asked them to tell the class something others might not know about them. Erica told the class she liked sports. In two different episodes where the students were asked to use a word to describe themselves, Erica named herself the first time as energetic. In the second conversation she used the word sporty. Lian herself is energetic and sporty. I could see how easy it was for Erica to see the similarities.

Erica's relationship with Lian was important to her. As the year progressed I discovered that Erica did not have an easy year in Grade 5 with the girls in the class who were in Grade 6. In fact, as the year progressed some of the girls made it hard for Erica by being rude, excluding her, and, in some instances, bullying occurred. Lian talked about these episodes and, later in our conversations Erica spoke about them as well. I wondered if this experience had made Erica closer to Lian. Throughout Grade 5 Lian had intervened on Erica's behalf. In a taped conversation Erica spoke to me about Lian's involvement in the problems the previous year,

> Well first she, I, I, she could tell I'm upset. You know I don't have a smile on my face and I've just got a pout. And she, she'd ask me if anything's wrong and I'd kind of say no but then she could tell that I'm lying. And, and then so I'd started talking to her about it and I'd get really upset and then she'd call them over and that was the first time. And she talked to them and you know it, and then I

> thought it would help but it didn't and it went on and I, and I kept telling her about it and she kept keep talking to them. (taped conversation, March 7, 2003)

Erica had aligned herself with Lian; this much was obvious in Grade 6, but it was not a story that would be part of Erica throughout the year.

Erica was happy with the influx of new students at the end of the first week. Among the children who moved into the class were close friends of Erica. Clara, one of the new students, was a particularly close friend. Both girls were together in Grade 2 with Lian. In a later conversation, Lian admitted to telling both girls, when they were in Grade 2, that they would never be allowed to sit together for the rest of the year due to their constant talking. Erica, in an early conversation, related to me the first time she met Clara.

In this story Erica was new to the school. She had been at another school in a 6
French Immersion program for Kindergarten and Grade 1. She told a story of her first school that was full of tensions: tensions of language, tensions with teachers, and a tension around her mother's wish to volunteer and the lack of welcome for her in the class. In the story of her first day at Ravine she talked of her mother leaving and her unease.

> Erica: … it's funny how me and Clara met because in the second grade, ah, we, we, Miss Elliot had us all in pairs, all around the class and she had the little placating on her desks. You, you know to get us all set up. And so Clara and me sat beside each other and then my mom left. I'm like, "Oh mommy, don't leave me." And then so, and then you know because we

had like nobody to talk to and the teacher was talking with parents and other students and teachers. So you know you sit, we just started talking and then the next thing you know we were getting in trouble together. Because this one time we took our plasticine and we like just kind of set it down, but it was kind of hard.

Shaun: Yeah.

Erica: And so it cut here and it hit … like it wasn't very hard on the head in front of Miss Elliot. So me and Clara went and picked it up and we went back to our desks laughing. We tried not to laugh but it was just so funny. That's one thing I will never, ever forget.

Erica carried this story of the beginning of her friendship with Clara. As Erica and I talked, it became evident to me that friendship was high on her list of what is important at school.

Erica's shifting story

At the beginning of the year Erica made her admiration for Lian evident. Her similar story of interest in sport and obvious regard for Lian were evident in her responses in class, telling similar stories, and her joy in being around her teacher. This story began to shift in January. Erica was less responsive in class and made less of an attempt to demonstrate how similar she was to Lian. This was a subtle change and one that was not evident in the field notes. I did not make notes describing Erica's shift. Rather, I began to notice it all at once. When I did notice, I asked Lian and she concurred with my observation. Erica had indeed shifted her allegiance to her friends. Lian was comfortable with this shift. She understood the importance of friendships among children, particularly among girls. She was glad Erica had these friendships. She recalled Erica's struggles with the older girls the year before and was pleased and not surprised by this turn of events.

> Lian also mentioned that she was aware that Erica had pulled back in her desire to align herself with her teacher. Erica it seems had become aware that it might not be so cool to be seen as a teacher's pet and had done a little separating in order to maintain her distance. Lian said she could respect that and understood what Erica was doing … it made sense to her. (notes to file, March 7, 2003)

In these field notes, which captured a conversation I had with Lian, there was a recognition of a shift in Erica's story to live by in school. Erica began to tell herself a new story and in telling herself this new story began to live a different story. It was a story that was obvious to everyone and, in a later conversation with Erica, she confirmed it. This shift on Erica's part was a conscious shift and one she was able to articulate in our conversation.

Sloughboy hears a story …

From where he sits in the slough Sloughboy can see her making her way toward him. She is, as always, determined in her progress and he is glad to see her. He has named her Certain-girl-shifting and she in turn has told him her name is

Erica Certainly. Certain is what she is, regardless of the name she is called and he can see that in the manner she makes her way across the slough. She waves from a distance and he waves back. Sloughboy likes this certain girl. He recalls her dancing, both on her own and on the surface of the water. He recollects there is a difference, but he does not remember what the difference meant.

Do you always sit there? she asks as she arrives.

No, he replies. Last time I was sitting over there. And he points to a place not far away.

Hmmph, it all looks the same to me.

Sloughboy looks ... it is not the same. He is certain of this, but keeps his certainty to himself; it is of no consequence in this conversation. Have you come back to dance some more? He asks this certain Erica.

No, she laughs. He loves it when she laughs; it is a way, he sees, of dancing. I have come to visit.

That is nice, he says, I have come to look forward to visits.

It is what friends do, she tells him.

Yes, and friends are important, he recalls out loud.

She nods.

I have also come to tell you a story, she says to Sloughboy.

That is good, he thinks. Out loud he says, I like stories.

Somehow I thought you might, is her reply.

Sloughboy settles into the branches and trunks of the willow. He crosses his arms around his knees and looks directly at Erica. He knows that this one will tell him a powerful story. Erica stands in front of him and holds her hands against her sides as she collects her thoughts, summons the story, and inhales in order to fill her lungs with power for the telling.

Whispers, that is what I hear ... whispers.

Sloughboy looks around. He can't hear any whispers. He does not know what Certain-girl-shifting is talking about. The wind is so still there is no breeze to even make the willow whisper to each other. Really? he asks, I can't hear anything.

No, she tells him, in the story, I am pretending to be the girl in the story. Haven't you ever seen someone act?

Sloughboy thinks about this. He knows that killdeer acts wounded when she is not so he won't find her nest. He does know about acting and he tells her.

Well then, she says, I am doing that. I am pretending to be the person I am telling you about in the story. Are you ready to listen?

He nods.

Whispers. That was what she heard. She could never tell where the whispers were coming from and they made her feel alone and unsafe. She did not know what to do. You see this girl lived in a village where no one was kind to her. Everyone avoided her and stayed away. Some people even went out of their way to make sure she knew they did not like her. The one place where she felt safe was outside of the village where no one else went because they were afraid of the animals that lived in the woods.

When she was in the woods she could hear whispers, but this was the whispering of the wind, or the leaves rubbing against each other. Here, away from everyone she felt safe and would happily spend her days playing and following animal trails through the trees. One day as she was following a particularly twisting trail she heard muttering. She froze. She never heard anyone else in the woods. She crept up to a large moss-covered rock and peered around it. Down the trail was the rounded back of what looked like a very old woman muttering and poking at the ground with a long walking stick. The girl watched and as the woman wandered further down the trail she began to follow. After following her for a while the trail emerged into a clearing, a meadow in the woods. The woman continued to walk, but the girl, whose name was Sara, stopped at the edge of the woods where she was still hidden by the trees. The woman walked a bit further and stopped. She leaned against her stick and lifted her face up to the sun. She stood in the meadow and did not move. Once she looked over her shoulder, but still did not start walking again. Eventually Sara understood that she was waiting for her so she stepped out of the safety of the trees and walked half way to her.

Brave and quiet. Two important ways to be in the world, said the old woman and she turned and looked at Sara, ... and not very big either.

For some reason this last statement made Sara stand up taller.

Hmmph, maybe not as small as I thought at first. Do you always follow muttering old women through the woods child?

No, replied Sara.

And what makes me so special? asked the woman.

Well, I've never seen a muttering old woman in the woods to follow before, so you would be the first.

Careful you don't spend too long in the woods or you will become a muttering old woman yourself.

Hmmph, Sara snorted, not likely.

Smart mouthed too, replied the old woman, and Sara blushed.

Smart mouthed but with the grace to know better. Not a bad way to be in the world either.

What were you looking for in the woods? she asked the woman.

Oh, this and that, things that are there to be found.

Sloughboy smiled at this point. He was liking this story and he knew all about looking for things that were there to be found. Keep going her told her, I like this story.

Certain-girl-shifting smiled and continued her story.

Could you show me what to look for in the woods?

Certainly, said the woman and they began to walk again. The woman pointed out plants and animal markings and things of interest in the woods. This became a pattern for Sara and the woman. Each morning Sara would rise early and join the woman in the woods, always finding her. Time passed and Sara began to know more and more about the ways of the woods. She also began to notice less and less of the whispers of the others in her village. She grew, although she did notice it and as she grew she became even less aware of the whispers. Then, one day, she saw some girls she did not know standing and talking to each other. One threw back her head and laughed and the others joined in. Their laughter made Sara wistful. She began to think of what she might be missing while she was in the woods all day.

She mentioned it to the woman that day, the laughter and her yearning. The woman stopped and leaning on her stick looked at the girl. She took her by the chin and lifted her head. She looked into Sara eyes and saw in them that which Sara wanted.

Then you must go child and be with them. That is the trail you must follow now. This is the path you need to follow in the world.

But I am afraid.

Yes ... so. Everyone is afraid. Being afraid is part of the path. Poke your fear with your stick and look at it. There are many things to be seen by poking at your fear and looking at it closely. You will be fine. They, like you, are not the same people they once were ... be brave and quiet, but remember your tongue and your manners.

So Sara abandoned the woods and took to life in the village again. It was not easy and some days she ached for the quiet of the path through the trees and of course, she missed her friend, the old woman. However, some mornings, through the mist on the fields she could see the old woman leaning on her stick watching her and she knew she was where she belonged. The girl did wonder if the old woman had enchanted her, but no, she did not think so, at least not in a magical way. Rather, it was an enchantment of friendship offered and open. She learned to poke her fear with her stick and sometimes she was quiet and sometimes she was not, but regardless she found her place.

That was a good story, Sloughboy tells his friend. Did it really happen?

No, it didn't really happen, things like it happen, but it is a made up story.

Sloughboy wonders about made up stories and not made up stories. He thinks there is a difference and there isn't a difference. He does however like Certain-girl-shifting's story.

You tell a story as well as you dance, he tells her, and she smiles.

Thinking about the shift

Why not just tell what happened in Erica's relationships with her teacher and other students straight up so to speak? Why cloak it in the guise of a story within a story? Partly it was an attempt to capture in one place the sense of Erica's unfolding story of relationships at school. Another reason was that as a writer and later as a reader it aided me in understanding Erica. Specifically, in the piece Erica became the narrator rather than Sloughboy because Erica was most certainly in charge of her own story. It was not just a literary device to give her name the prefix of "Certain." In the above story I wanted to give Erica more of a role of authorship because I became acutely aware, as I wrote about the children, that I was making something in my writing that was not wholly them and Sloughboy and his friends reminded me of this.

In the Sloughboy story, Erica created a story that I based on her experience in school. In this story I learned that I must attend to the relationship of Lian and Erica and the role Erica's mother plays. As well I was intrigued by the idea of enchantment. Lian certainly did not work at enchanting Erica, rather Erica was enchanted by Lian and this enchantment resided in Erica. Lian was forthright and popular with her students, qualities Erica admired and ones I saw in her mother. It was easy for me as a researcher to imagine Erica's enchantment. In the previous school year Lian had indeed made a space for Erica. This was an intentional space and one I observed her making for other students throughout the year. It could be understood as a way of building a scaffold for identity, which supported the children in their stories to live by at school. It was a skill Lian possesses and one she used to the benefit of her students. However, when Erica no longer needed this space, Lian stepped away from it in order for Erica to become who Erica needed to be. In this situation Erica needed a circle of friends from her own peer group. Erica liked to be in control of situations and, although her friendships with her peers were important, and work, they were not without tensions. Erica had, however, learned a lot about being in school and friendship from her experiences with the girls from the year before. In her own words she described what she now knows,

> And um you know it's just, it's terrible when you come in every morning and all you do is you get teased and when you do a partner activity nobody wants to be with you and you're always doing things by yourself and it's just, and so I thought if I kept up with you know always being everything that I, that would happen to me again and I just, I remember last year I just thought, "OK, I don't need that." So I just, I laid off a bit. (taped conversation, May 16, 2003)

In this piece of conversation Erica and I talked about her experiences from the year before and what we learned from other people. This had developed out of a conversation on nested knowledge. Erica was able to talk about knowers knowing knowers and the shifts they scaffolded for each other. These scaffolded shifts are both epistemological (Lyons, 1990) and experiential (Huber & Clandinin, 2004).

These scaffolded experiences, which may be understood as nested in nature, had implications in Erica's narrative knowledge of self within the larger story of school. In a conversation about nested knowledge, Erica and I had a lengthy conversation about Catrina. Interestingly this piece of conversation wove in and out of nested knowledge. It was a piece about the nested knowledge Erica had of Catrina, the shifts she experienced in that knowledge, how that knowledge was constructed by her, how her knowledge was shaped by her teacher and how Erica understood the process of nested knowledge on the part of her teacher and principal. In a conversation about this, Lian and I explored the concepts of nested knowledge in relation to this incident.

Erica as nested knower

Nested knowledge (Lyons, 1990) relates to how knowers know knowers. Lyons explored the idea in reference to teachers knowing students and the ensuing epistemological shifts the teacher experiences in this act. Lyons used the trope of a web to explain the complexity of the connections, which I first wrote about in the narrative on Leo. The stories to live by of the members of the classroom contribute to a multi-textured, multi-layered act of nested knowledge in the community of the classroom. Lian was the scaffolding agent in the shifts in the stories to live by experienced by the children in relation to her. However, what became apparent was this was only one dimension of what was occurring. Teachers as knowers of children experience shifts in their stories to live by as they encounter the knowledge of children, therefore the children are also scaffolding shifts for the teacher. An added dimension is how knowers know themselves by how they are known by others. However, what contributed to the complexity of this web was that children as knowers also know other children as knowers. In the classroom community the teacher may sit at the centre of this web, but she is not a central component of all the relationships in the class which impact nested knowledge. There is no simple way to describe nested knowledge. It does not follow some simple domino affect of action and result. Rather, it is far more complicated involving the many relationships that occur in the classroom. It is reminiscent of looking at oneself in a mirror that contains the reflection of another mirror, thus creating an infinite number of reflections. Then imagine adding another set of mirrors at a different angle so that the image becomes even more complicated. Erica helped me to understand this complexity and particularly the nested knowledge of children knowing children.

Erica helps me know

I never asked her, but Erica always seemed to take our conversational moments with earnest seriousness. She would sit on the edge of her chair, slightly leaning over the table, intent on what we would talk about. I began this conversation by asking her how she knew things. What ensued was an interesting conversation where she told me she knows through a variety of means. These include eavesdropping, being told and shown by others, the intelligence and knowledge of her parents, the influence of media such as TV and videos, her own construction of knowledge that she explained using the example of her collection of chocolate bar wrappers and chip bags that may be of use in the future to explain her present, the information in books, and how practice and thinking about thinking helps her get things "perfect." I then asked how her teacher, Lian, helps her to know. She responded with things such as the rubrics Lian designs, writing, organization, Lian's teaching, and her response to school work. As the conversation progressed I began to get a sense of how well Erica understood this idea of knowers knowing knowers. I wondered aloud how the knowledge of other children in the classroom affected her and this took us to a conversation about Catrina. I was interested in exploring this with her because Lian and I had had a conversation about Erica choosing to work with Catrina on a project. In my conversation with Erica we spoke of this and how she used what she had learned from her teacher and a senior assembly to choose to work with Catrina, someone she would not normally select as a partner. As we talked about this moment of working together Erica explored the complexity of relationships in the classroom, how and what she knows about another knower in the classroom, and how this might benefit her.

Erica's nested knowledge of Catrina

Erica and Catrina were in different grades in the classroom and shared in many ways dissimilar plot lines of experience. Erica was a girl who belonged in a group of Grade 6 girls who were friends. Catrina was a girl who had no group with whom to belong in the classroom and often played with younger children on the playground. She had one friend she moved in and out of relationship with in the classroom and, I believe, was more often frustrated in this relationship rather than welcomed. Erica and Catrina, however, pay close attention to the other girls in the classroom and both want to do well in school. They would not be considered friends.

I was not present on the day of the activity in which they were partners, but had the incident recounted to me by Lian. The activity where they were partners was the editing of their writing for their HLAT[5] writing test. Lian offered that some of Erica's motivation might have come from an assembly earlier in the day where the principal had talked about responsibility among the senior students[6]. When I asked Erica if the assembly had some bearing on her choice of Catrina for a partner she indicated that yes, it played a small role, but more significantly was her knowledge of Catrina's ability as a writer and editor.

As Erica and I talked, I tried to elicit information about what she knew about Catrina. Erica gave me information about Catrina's ability with schoolwork and sociability. I also learned information about Erica. In this conversation Erica was helping me understand what and how she knows in school. In our conversation about Catrina I saw a negotiation between nested and relational knowledge. The negotiation between these two made this knowing rather than knowledge. There was also a strong practical thread in what Erica was doing. She knew that Catrina was good at this and she availed herself of Catrina's knowledge and skill in writing.

I was interested that Erica seemed to know a lot about Catrina as a student. She commented on Catrina's ability to quickly get her work done. She referred to her as smart, drawing parallels between the two of them, naming both of them as smart,

> My mom even said that, you know you're pretty smart and you're smarter than a lot of people. And then you can, like that's the same with her because she's, she's

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[5] HLAT is the Highest Level of Achievement Test and is a system test given at each grade level. It is required by the school system that every student in this school take the test.

[6] The school is divided into three groups of students. Kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2 are primary students; Grades 3 and 4 are junior students; and Grades 5 and 6 are senior students. The students typically have weekly assemblies in these groups exclusive of the other groups.

> very smart. She's always, like almost, she beats me too. She's got all of her, her work is always done really quick and she's, she doesn't, that's probably why no people hang out with her because … Most of the time everybody's talking to everybody and she's, you know she's always ready, she's always the first one done when it comes to something and she gets really good marks and I've noticed that. (taped conversation, May 16, 2003)

I did not ask Erica why she knew this information about Catrina, but from conversations with her and observation in the class it was obvious that Erica paid attention to what was happening around her. These observations influenced her decisions and actions in class. Earlier I spoke of how she eavesdropped on conversations to remain informed.

> Shaun: So how does the eavesdropping work?
>
> Erica: Well I'm not really proud of that but I'll just you know I'll be standing there and I kind of like if I'm, like Miss Elliot you can sometimes hear on the phone so like if she's like it, there was this one time when there was a few people who were in trouble and they were talking back and forth and that's how I kind of found out. (taped conversation, May 16, 2003)

Erica also stated that she, "find[s] out different things so because it could be whether I read something or I watch something or I hear something." These statements indicated to me that Erica actively sought to know and, these skills had actively informed her about Catrina's ability.

What was significant in this partnership was my surprise, and to a certain extent Lian's surprise that Erica had chosen to work with Catrina. This surprise was also quickly followed by my lack of surprise, because as an observer of Erica it was completely within the realm of possibility for her to step out of her social group to work with Catrina. This was because I saw Erica as an individual who paid attention to what adults said and often took their suggestions to heart. Erica was complex in her use of relational, nested, and practical knowledge.

In contrast to Erica's complex ability to describe why she chose to work with Catrina, Catrina's continued response to my questions about working with Erica was that it was "cool." When I push to understand cool, the most I get was, "because like we've never actually like, we've never worked in partners before and so it was like cool" (taped conversation, May 16, 2003). This response from Catrina located her working with Erica in the relational, while for Erica there was more happening. This was not to imply that Catrina saw no practical benefits because she did say that Erica helped her see the need for more descriptive words.

Thinking about nested knowledge

Nested knowledge exists within a relationship and is therefore shaped by relational knowledge. However, as a component of relational knowledge it can be thought of separately and used to think about how the specific relationship of knowers knowing knowers works. Because classrooms exist as places where knowledge is a central element, nested knowledge is an important part of the life of the classroom. Lian, as the teacher, knew many things about the children in her class. This knowing was based on a variety of things and, for Lian, circles around practical, narrative, relational, and embodied kinds of knowledge. Indeed nested knowledge as a kind of knowledge is reliant on the other ways we know.

Lian constructed lessons and activities based on what she knew of her students, what she knew of them as knowers. These lessons and activities informed her of her students. Once a week the class had a spelling test. The spelling test was based on words the children and Lian had selected from their written work or words of interest to the children. Therefore, for each child the test was unique. As an observer in the class it was an interesting way to test spelling and encourage children to practice words they needed a better understanding of in their writing. However, it was also something more than just spelling to Lian, it was also a way of knowing her students.

In a conversation on nested knowledge Lian used the spelling test as one way to describe how she knows her students. My initial reaction to this statement was that it helped her know about them as spellers, but for her it was more than spelling. The spelling test provided her with insight into what was important to the children. She based these insights on the sentences the children created to demonstrate their knowledge not only of the spelling structure but also the meaning of the words. Often, according to Lian, these sentences were also about what interests are important to the children. The following was how Lian described how this occurred,

> … So I can, I get sentences and I go, "Oh." You know or I wrote this math test, or Kim will write sentences about me, five sentences about me. Or Dylan wrote, "My teacher and I played basketball today. I lost but it was fun." … that was important to him … So I'll go, OK, we need to do that again ….So like even

> through those kinds of things … We can learn about them. I just think writing, speaking, listening, all of those things are, that's the core of your language arts curriculum, right ….And so depending on what focus you have now and [the relationship you have with the children I think more about the meaning and] I don't get into the technicalities as much as I should and I'm going to have to do that. When I get to a higher level, but I think I use a lot of my language arts to do that. (taped conversation, April 17, 2003)

Lian's nested knowledge of her students helped her scaffold experiences for them in school. It could be suggested that she was scaffolding epistemological shifts, and, while this may have been her intent, it was difficult to judge if a child's epistemology had shifted. Certainly their knowledge shifts, but can the same be said about their way of understanding knowledge? The epistemological basis for nested knowledge would indicate that, as knowers know knowers, small shifts occur. The children in this inquiry were able, to lesser and greater extents, to discuss how they knew. As an adult, Lian had difficulty discussing her epistemological stance and I also find it difficult to articulate my personal epistemology. Although reading has clarified my understanding it still is a difficult concept to articulate. Therefore, I examine how nested knowledge works in terms of experience.

Thinking about how nested knowledge influences experience allowed me to consider how the children and the teacher may experience shifts in what they know about themselves. This is different than what they know about their knowing. It is a dynamic movement between knowing self, being in relationship, having a pedagogical response, and a subsequent re-knowing. Erica and Lian had known each other since Grade 2 when Lian taught her for the first time. They had a pedagogical relationship that had been shaped by three years of working together. Lian helped Erica make the transition from a French immersion school to an English school. She helped her navigate a year of difficulty with older students and, now in Erica's sixth school year, she watched her shift her alliance from Lian to her friends.

All of this influenced how Lian knows Erica and how Erica knows Lian. Looking at this relationship from the perspective of nested knowledge there was a dynamic movement back and forth between the two. I wondered if it was hierarchical in nature and, while I did not dispute the weight of Lian's opinion of Erica in Erica's eyes, I also understood, through Lian, the influence Erica, and other students had, on how Lian knows.

Erica at work

In the classroom, particularly at the beginning of the year, Erica was focused on her work. This is significant to note in a temporal sense because, although she remained a good student, her focus shifted to encompass her friends as well. She completed assignments on time and worked on the presentation of them. Appearance in her work was important to her, which I saw as I reviewed the samples I had of finished pieces. In November Lian and I asked the students to create found poetry using their report cards. As I described earlier, we did some introductory lessons so the children would understand the concept of found poetry. Initially the children used fairytales to create their poems.

We talked about the process and refined it somewhat before giving them their report cards. Erica created a poem that demonstrated her ability to be a good member of school.

Erica

Active and interested member of the class

Follows rules

Shows respect

Is a patrol and library buddy

Likes to work independently

Communicates well with classmates

Works hard

Put good effort into her projects

Got 7 A's, 1b

Teacher is Miss Lian Elliot

Room 1

Grade 6 (student work, November 20, 2002)

At the bottom of the poem was a drawing of a small math sheet with two-digit multiplication on it. Math was Erica's favourite subject. The poem was decorated with a border of flowers, roses on one side and tulips on the other. It was obvious from this poem Erica chose to celebrate her success at school, evident from the comments taken from the report card. The report card, in its entirety, was one of a successful student. Comments about good ability, helpfulness, being a good role model were throughout the report card. There was not one letter grade throughout the report — instead were the words "work meets standards of excellence." This comment was the equivalent of an A and when the students received their report cards, many of them referred to the letter grades they received. As was evident from Erica's report card poem, she was no different in the way she viewed her grades. It was also evident she wanted us to know how successful she was in school.

Earlier I wrote about the week in the spring when the children kept a daily journal of what had happened during the day. The intent of this exercise was to try and capture a sense of the week and then, using it as a type of field note, write poetry based on the information in the journal entries. We based this work on two pieces of fiction. The first, *Love that Dog* (Creech, 2001), is a poetic story about a boy and his dog. Creech used the idea of a journal and a boy's experiences with different poems in his class to tell the story of the boy and his dog. It played with the idea of poetry and provided Lian and I with examples of how to write poetry. The other work, *Witness* (Hesse, 2001), tells the story of a small town in the 1920's when the Ku Klux Klan tried to influence it. This book also relied on poetic form to tell the story from the perspectives of the people in the town. We used this book to talk about how, like a journal, the pieces based on the individuals tell a story of their experiences in town. We told the children that we hoped they would use their journal entries to write poems that captured a sense of their week in school.

In her journal entries Erica addressed each entry to a fictionalised character named Stephanie. She did not continue this into the poems she wrote based on the entries. Writing fictional letters was one way the class talked about writing a journal. Erica told me this when I asked her by saying that it helped her think. Erica's journal entries were composed mostly of what occurred during the week. She put little into them of the personal or relational. They read not unlike the agenda that is written on the board each morning. The entries however, had more detail.

The poems differ in the words she used and some of the details she added. She decided in the poetry to use as many of the wow words[7] as she possibly could; she underlined these words to draw attention to them in the work. Her Monday poem focussed on being at home, getting ready for school, and the morning at school. In it she wrote about sitting near Kim, a boy who played the role of class clown. She wrote,

> … had a desk change
> now i sit beside Joel
> but Kim sits right in front
> of me
> you must be placid to sit
> close
> to
> Kim
> i know i
> usually am (student work, March 10, 2003)

Placid was not a word that came to mind when one thought about Erica. It was not a word that she would use to describe herself in many situations, but after reading it I began to think about her in terms of being placid. I watched her in the classroom and realized, in her behaviour, she had become more placid. She was less involved in class discussions and had become less visible in the class as an eager student willing to align herself with the teacher. This confirmed what I noticed of the shifts in her in the classroom. It was a word that confirmed, along with a conversation with me, her desire to meet the approval of her friends. It was also a wow word and therefore underlined in her poem. I think it was used because it worked in the line, but it was a marker of how she saw herself in the class. Around Kim, she could choose to be placid.

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[7] Wow words are words the class get every week that they are expected to learn the meaning of and try to use in their work. As each week passes the word for that week is added to permanent display in the class.

At the time of this writing exercise Erica had a broken leg. Perhaps this made her feel more placid. With her broken leg she had many students helping her in class. Erica made the most of her broken leg and, while many of the children were glad to help out, some noticed how Erica was making it work to her advantage. In another piece of writing, where the students were asked to talk about a book they read that is important to them, Erica wrote about sharks. Lian and I set this lesson up by talking about books that influenced us in our lives. Both of us talked about personal moments in our discussion of the books. We talked about how the books we chose helped us know something of ourselves and the world.

Many of the children in the class wrote in the same manner, writing about books that made them begin to love to read, or understand something about themselves or the world. Erica's entry, however, was factual. In it she talked about what she learned about sharks. She gave details about sharks, talked about how dangerous they were and how she loved to read now about shark attacks. She closed the piece by saying how she continued to look for information about sharks on the internet where she also downloaded pictures of them. She ended by writing, "… and down load a lot of pictures. I have more than you can imagine." In a poem constructed using the journals they kept for a week Erica wrote,

tuesday: day #2

i got to school

hoping for another

outstanding day

i got to class and went

straight

to o.t.t.e.r.[8]

after a while

we

set

some

march

goals

that didn't take long

we got started working

on our

novel

---

[8] O.T.T.E.R. is an acronym for "our time to enjoy reading," which was a silent reading time in the classroom.

projects

i am working

on a

diorama

and a

poster

i hope to get

good marks

on them

after recess

we had

a

social quiz

it was

hard (student work, March 10, 2003)

This was a practical poem. It told us what she had done in school that afternoon. It spoke to the afternoon agenda and her wish to get good marks, even though it was hard. This was an important aspect of Erica, the hard-working girl focused on doing well. It was a theme often repeated in her work at school. She chose to work with Catrina because she recalled the conversation at the senior assembly and she knew that working with Catrina would stand her in good stead as a learner. This did not imply that Erica is callous in her interactions, thinking of herself first and foremost. Rather it indicated a careful consideration of what was good and what was helpful, the fact that it was also good and helpful to her was her efficient thinking at work.

Erica was able to discuss nested knowledge in ways that helped me understand it in her story to live by in school. She also was able to talk openly and clearly about her relational knowledge with Lian and her friends. The practical side of Erica was evident in these discussions and she was instrumental in helping understand the ways these kinds of knowledge influenced her at school.

Birch Story

Sloughboy stretches his legs. He has been sitting for a long time in the crux of a willow wondering about important things. Indeed, he has wondered long and hard about the slow story he was not able to hear the birch telling. He recalls snippets of the story from moments when he was able to slow his own thoughts enough in order to listen carefully to the story of the birch. It was a hard thing for him. He is used to running and doing and playing in the slough. He was able to listen to the story of the birch because he pretended he was floating in the water of the slough face down. Suspended in the soupy mix of slough and life he forgets sometimes where his body ends and the water starts. Listening to the story of the birch was like this in that the moment he heard the story the birch was telling, he did not know where his story ended and the birch's story started.

Sloughboy cannot stop his wondering. He does not trouble this however because he knows that some days are for wondering and others are for not wondering. His wondering takes him to thinking about his new friends. Now that they have met and talked and played he is not sure of where his story of himself alone and his story of himself and them are separate. He chuckles to himself at this strange wondering. What does it do for him? It is like a game of tag with Travis where you hide and seek at the same time. He knows this from playing it with Travis. He knows that when you hide you are also seeking as you try to see where the seeker is looking and when you are seeking you are hiding from those you seek so you can surprise them. Yet others think it is a game where you are either hiding or seeking separately, that you do one to the exclusion of the other. In his head this game of hide and seek continues he seeks while at the same time his thoughts hide from one another so instead of thinking about thinking he goes back to thinking about his friends.

Foremost in his mind this thinking day is Cheyenne, the girl he calls One-who-stands-among. He is certain of this name for her. The story she tells of herself and the one he hears is about a girl who stands firmly in her community. When she talks of herself and others there is no barrier between her two stories. She talks through no screen. She sees no separation in herself. He has heard her tell stories of herself but she seems to live within her situation. This is why

Sloughboy loves her because she loves others so clearly. She loves only because she can see that others require only to be loved without reason. It is a good lesson for Sloughboy because it is not the story that everyone else who visits him in the slough tells.

He smiles when he thinks of her storytelling. She smiles often and shrugs her shoulders. It is a funny gesture that she seems to use to shrug off her own thoughts. She does not look sideways so much as she smiles sideways. This smiling sideways is a curious way of saying she is blessed and what has she done to be so lucky. Sloughboy thinks she is wise. With her there is no hide and seek game, there is just talking. He sits where he has been walking and tries to imagine her slow story.

He does not imagine a smooth story for One-who-stands-among. Everything she has told him has not been told with a smile. She has an understanding of being set apart for difference. Yet in his mind he can see her shrugging off this memory, a shrug of forgiveness for a teacher in her past who could not see another way. She tells of her mother helping her to make a space in her life where this teacher is tolerated without giving her power. Yet in his listening Sloughboy can see that she has had to work to understand this way of being. In his head he can hear her talking about this person ...

'Stop talking like a baby,' And I wasn't really. It was just my voice.

Sloughboy wonders what it means to talk like a baby. He thinks of the babies he knows, the silent fawn, the demanding hatchlings, the wriggling tadpoles, the yipping of the coyote pups, the growls and mewling of the bear cubs, all of them have a voice and it is just their voice.

Sloughboy has a sense that at the same time she is telling him her stories there is a slower story happening within her. He walks to the birch grove to stand in a place of slow stories. Perhaps being in this place will help him understand better. When he gets there he, as always, is struck by the quiet, the reach of the trees and the way they seem to stand apart but together. He turns in a slow circle looking at them. He selects one and, walking to the tree, he leans his head against it. With his forehead pressed to the bark he wraps his arms around the trunk, slowly his breathing eases. He closes his eyes and imagines his body floating in the murky water. He feels the papery bark on his arms and the hard wood against his head. Bony tree and bony skull make contact.

Sloughboy senses a beginning for this tree that is told as it tells of the moment. In the story of the birch he senses himself, a boy, leaning against the tree with his arms wrapped around it. In the story the tree tells of its beginning it also, at the same moment, tells a story of its present being. This story reminds Sloughboy of the first time he recalls the slough. Lying wet beside the pool he remembers looking up at the small green leaves of the willow. On one branch *however there are three dead leaves. Three brown leaves in and among the green living leaves of the tree.*

This memory stirs him and tears fall from his eyes against the bark of the birch. He hears the story of the birch shift. It tells a tale of salty rain falling on it made by this boy holding tight and this reminds the birch of the long days of rain, the short cloudburst of hot summer days and those days of long drinking in early spring when rain falls wet on to the bark and soaks through the ground to its roots … stories within stories, memories within experience, moments from before and now. This is the way of all things thinks Sloughboy.

One-who-stands-among cannot tell the story of the teacher she loves without telling the story of the teacher who made no space. Sloughboy begins to see why this story is so slow within the sap and fibre of the birch. It is a story not being told to anyone. He wonders if even the birch hears it. Rather he seems to sense that it is the story of a birch living. He has a sense of how this might happen to a person and what it might be like when one hears this slow story in their body.

The Boy-who-would-be-seen settles in his mind. Sometimes he feels his friend drift away from him in conversation. Sloughboy wonders if when this happens the Boy-who-would-be-seen is listening to a slow story within him. A story of boy in school, boy outside, boy at home, boy in places of comfort and boy in places of *tension. All of these boys dance in and out of Boy-who-would-be-seen's story of self. They also dance in and out of Sloughboy's story of Boy-who-would-be-seen.*

High above him he feels the birch begin to dance in the slight wind that moves among their tops. Were they dancing before or did Sloughboy only begin to recognize the dance when he began to think about it? This thinking about thinking is beginning to hurt Sloughboy's mind. Here he can imagine Boy-who-would-be-seen laughing at him and telling him he thinks too much. Sloughboy thinks Boy-who-would-be-seen thinks just the right amount. It is one of the pleasures he finds in his friendship with this dancing boy. He wonders what sense Boy-who-would-be-seen would make of the birch's story. In his imagination he can see Boy-who-would-be-seen shrug his shoulders but at the same time think deeply. He imagines his response to be, "they are doing what they do" and indeed they are, but Sloughboy still wishes to know what they are doing. By this he means he wonders how they tell such a slow story.

Wondering he does what he does with the grass sometimes. He plunges his hands into the roots of the birch and to his surprise they are right there. He feels them fanning out around him. These are not the deep roots of the willow. They radiate out from the birch and make a circle around. The circle reminds him of the circle Boy-who-would-be-seen danced into the grass of the slough. Boy-who-would-be-seen had told Sloughboy that the circle they made was to make a way for the *other dancers to tell their stories. In the circle story of the birch Sloughboy learns how the birch come to know their story, they take it from the ground around them.*

Sloughboy's new friends are not unlike the birch. They too seem to take their stories from the ground around them. When he hears them talking he hears the places they have stood within. He knows these places are places of the body. In their stories he can hear the conversations they have had with their surroundings. Sloughboy knows this way of being. He is always in conversation with the slough. Like his other friends in this place, not his visiting friends, but Cravenbeast and the grass, the slough is his constant companion.

This line of thinking brings him to wondering about this place called school of which all of his new friends talk. It would seem to him, like his own story, it plays a role of constant place. The distinction is not lost on Sloughboy that he names the slough companion and school place. He senses in their tellings a different way of being in the place of school. Indeed, in each of their stories where school slips through, they are different from each other. One of the things Sloughboy likes to do is to stand in the middle of all their stories and know what he knows. This is the way he came to know Woman-who-binds. In the place of school she is the constant companion to these friends. He wonders if one day he will meet her. He wonders if she might wander into the slough and play a game with him. For a moment he tries *to imagine the game they might play, but in that place of his imagination he cannot find such a game he would play with someone who seems so powerful. Instead he listens to the story of the birch.*

Unlike the grass roots there is no steady murmuring in the roots of the grass. There is instead a sense of listening. Perhaps this is because the birch stands alone. He does feel the places where the roots of the birch touch the roots of other birch. In this place the roots lace in and out of each other, never really touching, but close enough to share what they know. However, as Sloughboy moves his hands into the places where the roots of other birch come close to each other, he hears one story from one tree and a slightly different version the other birch tells to herself after it has heard from the other. He knows as he listens that either story does not outweigh the other. If he listens hard, and he must be very quiet to do this, he hears the truth in each the pieces that are the same. He understands that one story is not more important than the other and he tries hard to make this idea stick in his memory.

This is not like the grass where part of the telling and knowing is in the arguing. This arguing is often about which version is the most true or in the words of the grass, "the real story." When Sloughboy listens to the grass he often smiles at their arguing, but he has learned to never think of it as foolishness because it is a way of making sense.

Abruptly Sloughboy pulls his hands from the roots of the birch. He has suddenly grown tired of trying to hear the big slow story of the tree. He shakes his hands flinging off the dirt, but some remains. He brings his hands close to his face and examines them. In doing so he sees the dirt. Small pieces of the ground cling to him. It outlines the whiteness of his fingernails, it shades the creases of his skin. Like a kind of skin it crawls up his arm to the place where his arm remained above the ground. In places he can see his own skin unblemished by the dirt. The patterns of dirt on his arm are like a map and he wonders why it stuck in some places and not in others. His mind has slowed from listening to the birch. Their way of telling has influenced his way of thinking. He becomes entranced by the dirt, these small traces of earth on his body. He brings his hand even closer to his face. It fills his view so that all he can see is skin and dirt. He brings his other hand up and together both of them share his vision, one eye for each hand. To anyone else it would look like he is hiding, but his hands are still far enough away to let light aid his vision. This light is not constant however, for it dances in and out of the birch leaves above him. In this manner the birch continue to influence his knowing, but he does not register this as he looks at his hands. There is no sideways watching in his looking, this is straight ahead looking, perhaps if he did look sideways he would see the dancing of light and leaves. This, however, is a look of concentration. He knows the skin of his hands and so, out of interest, he looks more closely at the dirt. The *pattern of dirt is new. This close his nose can smell and his tongue slips out to taste.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cheyenne: Working at Understanding in Relationship

Cheyenne was one of the students I met the previous June when I went to meet the children with whom I might be working. I had been to the school before to meet the teachers and at that time Lian and I decided to work together. After our meeting that day we returned to her classroom where I was introduced to the children. I spent some time in the room and then left, arranging to come back in mid-June to meet the class that might be together the following year. This field note indicates that Cheyenne was already making a space in my story of the classroom.

> Their faces don't stand out for me yet although I do recognize one of the girls. She smiles at me and seems friendly as I spend time in the class. There are many Grade sixes of course and I meet them but their names don't stay in my mind, as I know they will be gone next year. (notes to file, June 15, 2002)

The girl with the smile remained in my memory over the summer and was one of the children I talked to on my first day with the whole class in September. I talked with her because we knew each other from that day in the previous school year. At this time I did not know that I would be working with her. When I returned to the classroom in September after the children had started, Cheyenne was one of the first students into the class,

> The bell rang and the kids came in. Cheyenne was first and I remembered her from last year. She is an awake kid from what I recall and attentive to the class. I

> enjoyed working with her the few days I was in last year and look forward to working with her this year again. (notes to file, September 4, 2002)

She stayed in my memory as an awake individual. I wondered why I wrote this and chose the words awake and attentive with which to describe her. I wondered because my observations to that point would have been superficial and brief. Still I had already begun to shape my knowing of her based on our initial meeting three months earlier. I would write more about meeting her at the beginning but my field notes moved onto other children, other events of the class. What was significant was that she had become part of my recognizable story of Lian's Grade 5/6 class in Ravine Elementary. The next field note I had about her was significant as it began to illustrate how I began to think of Cheyenne in the classroom.

Explaining to others, explaining to me

I was in class. It was a fall morning in September. I followed the class to music and watched them working in groups as they put music and sound to a fairytale. Leo was reading a book, not interested in the project at all it seemed. Cheyenne was to provide sound effects in her group. When we returned to class the students listened to the book, *Yuck, A Love Story* (Gillmor & Gay, 2000). Lian used this book to frame a discussion around the book projects they were working on. She showed them the rubric she would be using to mark their work, then they had time to work on their projects. I helped around the class. I talked with Catrina who told me her little sister had eaten her homework. When I told her that I had heard of dogs eating homework but not little sisters she assured me it was true. It was then, in this time of walking around the class, I realised there was a heated conversation going near the front between Erica and Dylan. The field note of that moment captured some of what was occurring,

> Lian had to explain some things to the other classes and so left to do it. The class was a little more restless with her gone, but still worked. I was working with some other students when I realized some heated conversation was occurring with Erica and Dylan, with Cheyenne trying to mediate. I heard Dylan say to Erica "You're not an Indian, you're a white person." Erica replied, "And I'm proud of it." Then Dylan was out of his desk doing some dance steps. I asked him what he was doing. He said dancing. I had heard him say he had learned it on the reservation so I assumed it was a traditional dance of some kind. When I asked him what the dance was for he said he learned it from Mr. Magoo. In conversation I realized that Mr. Magoo was some kind of singer and that Dylan had learned the dance over a length of time. Cheyenne, Erica and Kara were watching him as he did it. When I asked him about the dance he got up and did it again for me. (notes to file, September 13, 2002)

I wanted to know more about the conversation but Dylan was unwilling to talk to me about it, telling me it was an "Indian thing" and he didn't want to talk about it. Curious still I asked Cheyenne if she could tell me what happened. Her response is captured in this field note,

> I asked Cheyenne what had happened and she told me that Dylan had said he gets money from the band council and that Erica hadn't believed him. Dylan had said

> to Erica what would she know about it. Cheyenne said she knew because she was aboriginal. Dylan said it was true, but Erica said she still didn't believe him. Then Cheyenne said they started having this conversation thing and as she said it she waved her hands back and forth. She seemed kind of exasperated with them for arguing over it. (notes to file, September 13, 2002)

Perhaps I should have asked her if she was exasperated by their conversation. Maybe she was exasperated with me for having to retell it. Regardless, she told me and therefore helped me to understand, and by doing so, named for me one of the defining aspects of who she was in the world. Beyond telling me she was Native, she also showed me that one of the ways she was in the classroom was about being a person who tried to understand the story of others. In this instance she used her understanding in the world to help her help others to understand. She helped me, I hoped she helped Erica, and maybe she helped Dylan. I still recall her waving hands as we stood outside the school and the perplexed look on her face as she tried to understand what had happened in the room.

Sloughboy and Cheyenne

Sloughboy had been meeting many people. He knew that he was changing from these encounters but what was he to do about it. Not that he actually thought he should do anything at all. When he told this to Coyote he had been laughed at. Mind you Coyote typically laughed. Then Coyote had leapt to his legs and chased his

tail in a circle for what seemed like ages before he lay down panting on the grass again. Sloughboy looked at Coyote and asked him why he had just chased his tail.

I wanted to know what it was like to think about changing when we have no choice but to change. The only way I could understand this thinking was to chase my tail. I understand now that this kind of thinking is always in front of your eyes and is only fun if you like chasing it, but it can be tiring. See how I pant? And he laid his head on his forefeet and dozed off.

He is right thought, Sloughboy, thinking about if I am changing is like chasing a tail. If you could catch it what would you do with it? So he stopped thinking about how he was changing and just let himself change. That way one day I will be surprised by who I am.

Sleeping Coyote was no fun so Sloughboy got up to take a walk. He liked to walk through the slough. He passed by the dancing circle. So far Boy-who-would-be-seen had not returned to dance with him. Neither had Travis the hide and seek boy or Ghost-girl-who-knows. He wondered what they were doing in their places. Did they have friends who laughed at them like Coyote laughed at him? Maybe. He would have to ask about their friendships the next time they came to visit. Wandering out of the slough he walked through the trees to an open field at the top of the rise above the slough. In the space he saw a girl kicking a ball. He stood in the shelter *of the last trees and watched her. She was good. She made the ball move with her feet and knees. Sometimes she even bounced it off her head.*

These new people were always playing, making things or pretending. He wondered what she was pretending. He did not think she was dancing because he knew from Boy-who-would-be-seen that when you dance you have a pattern. There was no pattern in her movement although all of it was focused on the ball. She seemed to be content with who she was as she played. He did not think she was pretending and he could see no other person with whom she could be playing. He stepped out of the trees and, startled, she stopped. She seemed scared of him and he wondered what he had done to frighten her.

Where did you come from? she asked.

He pointed through the trees in the direction of the slough.

I didn't know anyone lived there, she said.

I do.

Can I play with you? He knew to ask this question now. Perhaps she would let him play with the ball.

In answer she kicked the ball over to him and he kicked it back. They did this for a while and then she told him to try and get the ball away from her. He tried but could not. She was fast, faster than him with her twisting and kicking, *nudging the ball here and there. Soon they were both out of breath and they stopped.*

Show me where you live, she said.

So he walked back through the trees and down to the slough where he stopped and said, Here.

She looked around. You live in this? she asked.

Something in her voice made him look at her.

No offence, she said. Do you have a house?

Twice he had been asked that now and the answer was still the same, No.

Where is your family?

I don't have one.

Then how can you live here? she wondered and looked at him strangely.

Where is yours? he asked her back.

At my house.

Her answer, so simple, it intrigued him. What is a family? he asked, because although he had heard this word before and Cravenbeast had told him about such a grouping and he had seen Coyote with other coyotes he did not really understand what a family was in the world.

My mom and dad and my sisters.

Do you like them?

Of course I like them. I love them.

He moved his head sideways to see her differently. He noticed that when she said she loved them she kind of glowed a little more and there was no reason for this because the sun had not started to shine more brightly. Are you like the grass? he asked.

The grass?

Yes, the grass. They live all around me and they seem to be a family.

She laughed at this. I guess we are like the grass, although I do not know if they are a family.

Sloughboy could hear the grass' response to this ... if grass could snort, they were snorting in the wind.

They are family he told her, and those, pointing to the poplars, are their cousins.

I have cousins, she said. I have one cousin I love very much. There was that word again. And she was shining more again. I have many cousins, she said.

So do the grass.

So I guess I am like the grass, she replied.

And then her name was there for him to see ... One-who-stands-among.

He liked her name. It said many things to him and he said it out loud. What did you say, she asked?

I said your name.

My name is Cheyenne, she told the boy.

It is also One-who-stands-among, he told her.

What is that supposed to mean?

It means that like grass and poplar you stand among others in your life and know your self by this standing in place.

Whatever, she said laughing at him.

He knew this was not a mocking laugh, the kind of laugh he heard from raven sometimes. Raven liked to mock him. Raven knew many things and he knew how to mock Sloughboy well. This girl was not mocking him. She was just laughing.

Wait until I get home and tell my family.

See, said Sloughboy.

See what?

You do not keep stories to yourself. You tell them to the people among whom you stand.

Of course I do. They are my family.

Of course.

Then she told him he was funny.

And he heard her telling him he was strange, but she liked his strangeness. He could imagine telling this girl many of his stories. She reminded him of Coyote. He thought she must chase her tail sometimes and then laugh at her chasing.

Tell me a story she told him and he did, not surprised that she had asked.

They lay in the grass head to head looking at the sky and this is the story Sloughboy told One-who-stands-among. This is the story of the storyteller he began.

One day as I stood in the slough I saw a man walking through the grass. He had a long crooked stick that he used to walk with as he moved through the slough. I had never seen him before and so I followed him. After a while he stopped in a stand of birch. He stood there leaning on his stick. I stood behind one of the birch watching him. There is no need to hide, he said.

I am not hiding I called back, I am watching.

Then I stepped up to him and looked at his stick, for it was carved with many wonderful things I had never seen before. Do you like my stick?

I nodded.

It was indeed a beautiful stick. Go ahead ... touch it.

As I did the stick seemed to whisper to me. The whispers changing as I ran my hand over its surface.

This is my story stick. All the stories I have heard are on this stick.

I thought to myself that the stick seemed small for a man who must have heard many stories, but I could see the stick shifting in front of me as he spoke. Other images appeared and melted. This was how all the stories fit on this stick. Then I saw something seeming to grow on the stick.

That is your story, said the man, pointing.

But I haven't told you anything yet.

But you have he told me. You are a boy who lives in the slough. You live alone except for your companions. I do not know their names, but they are your friends. You dwell in this place. This makes you a dweller.

I knew this name for people from the dancing boy.

You would do well to remember this name for yourself. It is an important name. You will meet a girl who is also a dweller.

How do you know who I will meet? If I haven't met her yet how can she be part of my story?

I know because your story has been grafted to the stick. She is there to be seen if you know where to look. I have lived with this stick always. I know how to listen to it.

I tried to see a dwelling girl in the stick but I could not even tell which story belonged to me and he did not seem to need to point it out.

Why do you have this stick?

Because it is the job of some to hear the stories of others. To mark them down and tell them when they are needed to be heard. It is a way, he told me.

What he was saying made sense and did not make sense. This man was strange. Not funny strange, confusing strange.

Not all stories make sense he told me. And not all stories need to have sense made of them. Some stories exist just for the telling and hearing. That is their reason. And then he did another strange thing. He made a hole with the stick and dropped a seed in the ground.

Why did you do that? I asked looking around at the birch.

Who knows? he said. And walked away.

I watched him disappear into the trees and looked for the hole he had made. I could not find it. Everyday I go to the birch to see if anything has changed and nothing has.

That is a strange story, she said. Why did you tell it to me?

It was the one that came into my head and I wondered if you were the dwelling girl.

How would I know? she replied.

But Sloughboy thought she was in the ways she talked about her family.

He thought to himself that when One-who-stands-among others knows their stories she is dwelling in that place. But he kept it to himself.

Stories of standing among

Cheyenne never spoke to me without somehow speaking of her family. In all of our conversations her family always stood with us. She spoke of her sisters, her parents, her grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousin. She spoke lovingly and respectfully of them all. She particularly loved her cousin. She told me a story of her cousin, a boy who struggled to hear, but could with the help of hearing aids. She worried that he was a boy who could be teased and Cheyenne wanted to keep him safe. Respect was important to Cheyenne. She had many friends in class and I think much of this stemmed from the respectful manner she used when interacting with them. When I asked her where she learned respect, she told me it was from many people.

> Shaun: Um, where did you, you talked about respect a lot. You talked about it the last time we talked and you talked about it today. Where did you learn about respect?
>
> Cheyenne: Um I think Miss Stuart mentioned it and then my sisters also taught me how to respect. Because if I wouldn't respect their things then they would do it to mine. So then that's how another way I'd learn. So yeah, I just learned it from my family and Miss Stuart and Miss Munroe and Miss Elliot. (taped conversation, December 6, 2003)

In this piece of transcript Cheyenne named her family, the principal, vice principal, and her teacher. For Cheyenne respect was a reciprocal act. If she wanted respect she must be willing to respect others. She told me,

> And also like if you don't give respect to their things and then, and you think that they should just give respect to your things then that's not right because you need to give respect first in order to get it back. Or if they give you respect you should give them respect. So it's kind of both ways. People should just give respect to other people and respect like, yeah. (taped conversation, December 6, 2002)

What I liked in this piece of conversation was that she understood that she must give respect first before she could expect it in return. This was key, I believe, to the relationships Cheyenne had with the other children and staff at Ravine. She worked at understanding them but she played while she did it. In an interesting turn in the conversation we talked about dreams. This followed on a class discussion about school where Dylan spoke about a dream he had when he was at school and everything he did was contrary to the others. He walked backward, drank when no one else did, went to the wrong washroom, etc. In Cheyenne's dream she talked about playing red butt, a ball game, with other children and the staff. In this dream the principal was dressed as a punk. She told how she got to throw the ball at the principal and other teachers. In this dream all the teachers were dressed strangely, and all of them were playing the game. When I asked how she understood this dream she told me that it was about teachers having a wild side that you don't get to see at school; that they are people with complex lives like everyone else. Cheyenne told me in the dream, that even though she threw the ball at the teachers she was uncertain if this was the correct thing to do. They reassured her it was okay and she entered into the game enjoying herself because in this dream no one ever was hurt. Everyone was having fun and being outlandish. Even as she talked about the dream she talked about respect and relationship.

Cheyenne: And then so, we were playing red butt and Miss Stuart was right in there … And it was during school hour and it was just me, nobody else. And we … And then I was, and Miss Stuart she's done, she, like she was dressed in like all this punk stuff. Like she had like her hair was like a Mohawk and it was real weird, and they were doing stuff we weren't supposed to.

Shaun: Like what?

Cheyenne: They were like, they were dressing in tank tops and stuff and well Mr., Mr. Smith I guess, I, ah he dressed up as a girl, for some reason, I don't know why. And then, and then we were playing, and then I got Miss Stuart out and so she let me go as close as I could and whip the ball at her. She said, "Whip it as hard as you can at me." I did of course, I would because she told me to so I did and then, and then Miss Elliot wanted to and then Miss Stuart's like, "OK everybody gets a free shot at me." So then everybody's shooting at Miss Stuart and then when they got me out, I, I didn't have to get hit. They were, I got to hit them, that so, I never really go out. So it was just, it was fun. It was really weird though. And Miss ah, and Miss Elliot you know how she's kind of always like wearing um like sweats sometimes and then she's wearing like jeans or sometimes.

Well she was playing, like she was playing um like red butt with us too but she was in a skirt, in a skirt and stuff.

Shaun: Mmmhmm.

Cheyenne: So everybody was doing opposite things, like kind of what Dylan said. But it was opposite and stuff so, and so it was really, really weird. And then all of a sudden we end up going inside but um it, like ah, it was a kid that was the teacher and a teacher was in the desk and stuff.

Shaun: So was that dream telling you something?

Cheyenne: Yes.

Shaun: What was it telling you?

Cheyenne: It was kind of telling me that teachers always don't try to be mean to you. They're trying to like be nice to you but also they do play those kind of stuff but they just don't want you doing it at school so nobody gets hurt and stuff. And that teachers have a wild side and then a get down to business side so. (taped conversation, January 15, 2003)

As we talked more about the dream Cheyenne told me the next day she was reassured to see the teachers not as she saw them in the dream. She told me that it made her think differently of them, that their lives involved more than just the work they did at school. I saw this as a common theme in my conversations with Cheyenne. She was always trying to see a whole picture; to think beyond the moment. This included how she understood teachers and other children at school.

Chasing your tail

Sloughboy has been thinking about One-who-stands-among. In fact he cannot get her out of his mind, but he does not know what he is thinking. He is reminded again of the words of Coyote and he can picture him chasing his tail. He feels he is doing this as he thinks about the girl called Cheyenne, the one he names One-who-stands-among. He does not know what to compare her to. Sloughboy is a boy who is happy with his own company. He can spend days talking only to himself, much like he is doing now. He does not know what to make of her. She came into the slough, they played a game with a ball, she talked about her family, he told her a story and then she left. What he needs, he decides is a story from her. This is what he will ask her the next time he sees her. Now that he understands what he has been thinking he goes off to find Coyote. Coyote has been much on his mind too. He decides he will go and wrestle with him. Coyote is good to wrestle with because he follows no rules in wrestling. He does what he needs to in order to win the match. He is sneaky and sly and underhanded, but in the nicest possible way. He would laugh to know that Sloughboy even uses these words to describe him when that is who he is to be Coyote. After wandering long enough Sloughboy finds Coyote and they wrestle and neither one wins because wrestling with Coyote is not about winning, it is about wrestling. They lay, after, panting in the flattened grass. For a moment Boy-who-

would-be-seen comes to mind. Coyote told Sloughboy he has been chasing his tail again.

You can tell? asks Sloughboy.

Yes I can always tell, says Coyote, because you only come to wrestle with me when you have been chasing your tail, and he yips and laughs at his insight.

Why do you think I do that? asks Sloughboy.

There you go, says Coyote, chasing your tail and expecting me to help you catch it. You chase it because you have nothing better to do until you think it would be better to wrestle me. It is curious that you think of me when you sit chasing your tail. I don't mind though, you are becoming a good sneaky wrestler. Who knows, you may even catch your tail one day.

And with that he leaps up and runs in circles ever tighter until he catches his tail firmly between his teeth and dances with it in a tight little circle. When he lets go his body springs back into a straight line.

There, you see, it can be done, says Coyote, although my friend the fun is in the chasing. Who wants a mouth full of fur?

And he scampers away into the slough yipping and howling and laughing at who knows what.

Sloughboy thinks he is probably right and so to avoid his tail he goes for a walk and there she is, One-who-stands-among. He chuckles to himself at the *thought of how his thinking has brought her to the slough. She stands at the edge of one of the willow groves and sees him in the distance. She waves and he waves back. They walk toward each other until they meet.*

Hello, she told him.

Hello. I have been thinking about you, he told her.

What have you been thinking?

I have been hoping for a story from you. Do you have one for me?

I have lots of stories, she says. Let me think which would be best for you.

I will tell you a story of abundance.

Abundance thinks Sloughboy, I like that word. It sounds full of many things. They sit in the tall grass and One-who-stands-among points to a tall spruce at the edge of the slough halfway up the hill. Do you see that tree?

Yes.

Do you see how the top is full of pine cones?

Yes.

That is like my family. The thick base and lower branches support the pinecones at the top. I am among those pine cones. You can barely separate me from all the rest of them from this distance. If we climbed to the top I could show you which one is me. One day, I will fall from my family and begin my own tree. But I will *have started from that place of knowing that I am a pine cone like the rest of my family.*

Sloughboy looked at how thick the pine cones were at the top of the tree she was talking about. They were so thick he could not see the branches under them. The word abundance came to mind and he smiled.

That tree cannot make pinecones in any other way. They are always thick, they are always together and they are always in contact with the others. They overlap, they touch, they clack against each other in the wind. See how I am the smallest of the bunch. It is because I am one of youngest of the pinecones. My sisters are closest to me. They teach me many things about the world of our branch. They tell me about the wind, the other pine cones, the birds that come to feed off of us, the sun on our skins, and the family around us. My sisters help me to understand my world.

More so than your mother and father?

Yes, but in different ways. They are closest to me in age and they know what I need to know to be in the places I will go. My mother and father know things about how to act in the world. They learned these things from their mothers and fathers. You can see them closer to the ground. That is the way it is in my family. We help each other understand. See the pine cone nearest the top? That is my *cousin. I have many cousins as you can see, some who are close to me, and some who are far away. My favourite cousin is the one I have shown you.*

Why is he your favourite?

Because we love each other in a close way that I do not love any of my other cousins. He is much younger than I am, but I am his favourite too. I am his Cheyenne. In every family you will have your favourites, the ones you are closest too. This does not mean you do not love the others, it just means you love some more.

Sloughboy wonders if this girl, this new friend, chases her tail and if she ever catches it. What is your favourite animal? he asks her.

Gopher, she tells him quickly.

Gopher? he asks.

Yes gopher. They are so cute, smart and quick and they always live with their families in vast connected underground tunnels. You can see them all over Saskatchewan where some of my family comes from. They stand up tall out of their holes and watch you. Then, if you move, or make a sound, they all disappear into the ground. They are always looking out for each other.

Sloughboy is not surprised by her reasoning. He has heard of gophers, but he has never seen one. The grass talk about them from far away places. The gophers annoy the grass, but the grass has a respect for them, mainly because they *are not unlike the grass, except for the fact that they are animals and the grass often hold animals in mild contempt.*

Gophers like to play, but they are also very hardworking. They can't get all those tunnels built without working together and getting the job done. The thing most people don't know about gophers is that they always get the work done first. I'm like that, I always get my work done first.

Do you?

Do I what?

Get your work done first?

Sloughboy shrugs. He does not know what this work is. It sounds unpleasant in his mouth, although the way she says it, it is not unpleasant in his ears. I don't think I work much, he tells her. And she falls about laughing and in an instant he knows who she reminds him of ... Coyote.

He wonders if Coyote has sent her to him to confuse his mind and make him learn the chasing your tail game. He realises that when he thinks of her he is working. He sees how working can get in the way of play because it somehow makes a demand of your mind that play does not.

Which do you prefer he asks her ... work or play?

Oh I like them both. You can learn from both of them.

Like all the others who have come to the slough she is teaching him things he did not know.

He leaps up and runs on the spot in tight circles trying to catch his tail, but he cannot and he falls to the grass panting.

Didn't catch it, eh? She says.

Chasing the research tail: thinking about relational knowledge

This story of Sloughboy and Cheyenne came out of my struggle of trying to understand what she was teaching me. In this story, as in all my work with Cheyenne, the theme of living in relationships was evident. There was also the element of playfulness and hard work. As I reread what I wrote I also saw there was a mindfulness in how she was in the world. She told me in our conversations about her sisters and in one telling moment about how having a reputation at school was an important thing. This came out of the knowledge that she followed in the footsteps of her sisters and this was a good thing. She was glad to have them go before her. Lian had also taught Cheyenne's next oldest sister, Taylor. Knowing that Lian knew her family through Taylor was important. Lian had also coached Deanna, Cheyenne's eldest sister. Lian attended the games of the older sisters and followed Taylor's soccer career closely. Cheyenne was happy she would go to the same junior high school as Taylor because she would have a reputation there based on her sister and this reputation would keep her safe. It allowed her, I think, to enter into a story of her family. It was a story of powerful girls who were successful in school. She told me a story of her older sister and middle sister sticking up for each other at school, of how they dealt with a girl who was making trouble for Taylor. She explained how her sisters helped her.

Shaun: K. Is that the school you'll go to?

Cheyenne: Probably.

Shaun: Yeah? Do you think you'll like it?

Cheyenne: Yes.

Shaun: How come?

Cheyenne: Because my sister's there and then I'll have a reputation there.

Shaun: Oh, good and is a reputation important?

Cheyenne: Yes.

Shaun: Why?

Cheyenne: Because then you can get really cool and have even more and more friends and then people will know you and then if you get in problems there'll be somebody to back you up in case like it's a big bully. Then somebody'll be there to help you.

Shaun: … do you have a reputation at this school?

Cheyenne: Yes.

Shaun: What's your reputation at this school?

Cheyenne: Um it's, I, it's basically just, they just know me from Taylor and that I have a older sister and they kind of, they don't really bother me.

Shaun: Mmmhmm.

> Cheyenne: Like because like I got bothered before, like from people and my sisters kind of talked to them saying, "This isn't right and why are you bothering her?" And stuff so now people are kind of like, "Oh maybe we shouldn't do this or else we might get in trouble or something," because my two sisters told them that we would go to the principal about it and stuff. So, yeah. (taped conversation, November 22, 2001)

As I chased the research tail I was struck by how Cheyenne understood her family within the context of her whole life. There was no separation between home and school for her. Family helped her make sense in both places. Family made her feel secure within the context of school, both in her current context and in knowing the transition to a new school next year would be made smoother by the passage of her sisters. Cheyenne did not, though, have a smooth story of school. It was a place of tension for her in different moments. It had historically been a place of big tension. This tension was so big that it precipitated her family's move to Ravine Elementary. What follows is the story of Cheyenne and the disrespectful teacher.

The voice of another school: practical knowledge

Being safe was a theme that came up often in our conversations. Her family kept her safe as we saw in the story she told about her sisters. Her relationships with children and teachers at school kept her safe. The words of her mother kept her safe. Cheyenne told me of a school she attended before she came to Ravine. In this place she was not safe. She was not safe from the scorn of a teacher. This teacher objected to the sound of her voice. By Cheyenne's own admission her voice sounded different — lower, different. To the teacher it sounded like the voice of a baby and she told Cheyenne so. Cheyenne did not feel safe with this teacher, so she became quiet. She kept her voice to herself unless it could not be avoided. She talked to the children in her class; she talked to the other teacher who shared the room. She was wise enough to know that when the other teacher was in the room, the mean teacher would be nice. She was not as nice when she was the teacher alone.

> And well ah my voice was kind of more like lower and stuff and it was kind of weirder sounding, it kind …… to other people, well she always would say to me, "Stop talking like a baby." And I wasn't really. It was just my voice … and I couldn't do nothing. So I got all like, like all sad and stuff and I wouldn't really talk to her because I was all like, "Whatever if you're not," and she wasn't giving me good advice, like good advice and she'd always would yell at me and stuff. And my mom was getting kind of mad and upset with her. (taped conversation, January 15, 2003)

What surprised me the most was the maturity with which Cheyenne dealt with this situation. She learned to avoid the teacher. She developed strategies to deal with her when she couldn't avoid it, "I would not make any contact with her, or if she called on me I'd have to talk … But I'd try like to be like real, like a deeper voice" (taped conversation, January 15, 2003). And then Cheyenne told me in the same conversation, "I kind of just said, 'Well whatever,' … This, this is what she's thinking but I know it's not true. So I kind of just left her and then just did what I was supposed to do at school." I expressed to Cheyenne my amazement at her ability to handle the situation. I asked her how she knew what to do and she replied,

> Like my sisters, like they would go through those things and my mom would tell them those kinds of things, so I was kind of learning off of my sisters what they were doing ....And so I just kind of thought, and my mom would always talk to me and tell me, "Well don't worry about it. You only get her sometimes and not all the time. So just keep doing what you're doing at school and don't worry about her." And my mom would give me always that advice so I kind of thought, "OK." (taped conversation, January 15, 2003)

In this story of the teacher Cheyenne told of her attempts to deal with the situation. Eventually she tried to put up with it, but her silence, her aloneness in the problem was too much to take. She knew she couldn't talk to her mom because her mom spoke to the teacher and the teacher told her that she had not said anything about Cheyenne's voice and that Cheyenne was "lying." Cheyenne's mom knew she was telling the truth but in order to protect herself from the teacher Cheyenne backed away from telling her mom. Instead she turned to her sisters whom she trusted.

> Because I, I thought to myself, I kept thinking, "Well I need to tell somebody. I need to tell somebody because this is bad. I don't like being treated this way." So I said if I didn't, I kept saying to myself, and telling my sisters because I trusted them ... Because they weren't going to talk to my mom ....So they kept telling me, "Well you need somebody to talk to. Go to mom, go to mom." So I

> went to my mom and just kept going when my mom said, "Well don't worry about her. (taped conversation, January 15, 2003)

Her mother tried to intervene. She tried to intervene when other children made her daughters feel unsafe. She told Cheyenne to ignore the teacher and when she could not get anywhere with the teacher, she moved her children to Ravine.

Having a story of a teacher

Before she entered Lian's classroom in Grade 5 Cheyenne already had a story of Lian in her mind. Earlier I wrote that Lian had taught Cheyenne's next oldest sister, Taylor. Lian had also coached Deanna, Cheyenne's eldest sister, in volleyball at a different school. Therefore, Cheyenne already had a sense of who Lian was as a teacher and so did Cheyenne's family. There was, in the way Cheyenne talked about being in Lian's room, a sense of history in her knowing, a sense of knowing about this teacher through the relationships she had with her family. For Cheyenne this made entering Lian's classroom easier because she knew that Lian was "a bit easier … not as hard on me … she'd be a bit easier to work with" (taped conversation, January 15, 2003). However, her sister warned her, "if you do a wrong, you have to make sure that you don't do it again … and she said you just, you have to have a positive attitude with Miss Elliot and stuff" and therefore according to Cheyenne, "I kind of knew and like stuff so it kind of made it easier because I knew how to, like be, around Miss Elliot" (taped conversation, January 15, 2003). The history of Cheyenne's relationship with Lian came up in our first conversation, when she told me, "it like made me feel confident because my sister knew how she was and so I felt good going, because our family has relationships with her and, and she was really nice and she doesn't give a lot of homework. So that's what I like because we're so busy with sports and she knows that" (taped conversation, November 22, 2002).

Sport was important to Cheyenne and her family. Deanna played volleyball, Taylor was an accomplished soccer player with great potential in the sport, Cheyenne played soccer as well, and both of her parents played soccer: it is the family sport. When asked by Lian to choose two words to describe themselves at the beginning of the year, Cheyenne chose, "hard worker" and "put effort"(student document, October 24, 2002). However when I asked her in a conversation she told me she had forgotten what she chose, but that she would have picked athletic and creative. In a different context from the classroom activity Lian had them do, Cheyenne told me athletic. In the conversation where this came up we had been talking about her sisters. She went on to tell me she would pick athletic because she liked sports.

Soccer was important to Cheyenne. I went during the year to watch her play. She played defence and loved it. She was a good team member and as I watched I saw her congratulating team members, praising them, and calling out words of encouragement. In soccer, like school, relationship was important for Cheyenne. In a letter to me at the end of the year, Cheyenne thanked me for working with her and then at the bottom of the letter she placed a soccer ball sticker. She had drawn a circle around it with marker and in the same marker, drew an arrow pointing at the ball and the words, "my life is 1 thing." As I went through the work samples I collected from her, there was often a soccer ball drawn on personal writing. Soccer was one of the defining elements in her life. It was no surprise to me that it was also important to her family. I wondered if she could separate the two.

Practical knowledge and an embodied moment

Cheyenne and I were having a conversation about things that helped her to learn. This was part of our conversation on the practical knowledge she employed at school. In previous writing I had written about the practical knowledge she needed to deal with a disrespectful teacher, the ways her sisters made a space for her in school, and the ways she dealt with other children. All of these resided in the relational, but her application of skills in the thoughtful manner she had described also located them in the practical. In order to focus more specifically on practical ways of thinking about learning, I asked her for specific examples of what helped her learn.

This conversation began with strategies to improve skills in math, spelling, and writing. She talked about doing her homework, of working hard at school. She went on to say that talking to others helped her understand and to do this she might talk to a friend or an adult, her teacher, or a member of her family. She told me that rather than sitting there being stumped by a question she would work toward the end, "if I'm stumped on a question I wouldn't just sit there. I'd probably go on the, the like finish the whole page and then wait and then get help on that one question and stuff" (taped conversation, January 15, 2003).

Then, in an interesting part of the conversation, she told me about a computer game that she uses to help her think. We began by talking about checkers on the computer. Cheyenne told me that the game of checkers had taught her ways of thinking about attitude, math, and goals. She described the strategy of moving upwards on the screen in the computer checker game and how that helps her think about others with whom she might be working in the class, "Yeah like on the computer though. And it would help me learn because, help me learn with my problems because if you keep going forward at somebody they're just going to eat you up back. So kind of taught me like, like, like with, with like attitude and stuff"(taped conversation, January 15, 2003).

As I reread the transcripts it came to me that Cheyenne was talking in metaphor. Not in the sense of trope, but in the manner of metaphor as an embodied experience. As always, Cheyenne moved in and out of understanding in relationship as she told me, "If you're going forward at somebody to be rude and you're going to be rude, then they're going to come back at you and like eat your checker person … So that's how kind of I learned. So I kind of like would think of a defensive way and then that's how I thought with math too"(taped conversation, January 15, 2003). I used this as an example of embodied knowledge because Cheyenne was using a game to understand and explain ways she worked in school. This was the working of embodied knowledge. It took what we learned through our bodies and helped us to understand and articulate what we had experienced. Cheyenne could have told me that when you are rude it would come back at you. She could have told me that thinking about math was also a way of thinking about strategies with others, but instead she used her body's experience of a game to explain.

She continued, “Because if, if um I did a wrong question then I’d, I have to move back and then I kind of stay away from the person. But if I did a right question I’d move up” (taped conversation, January 15, 2003). Move up? She was talking here about moving forward to get the checkers on the far side of the board, or in this example of Cheyenne’s, the screen. It was also interesting that she used the idea of knowing people, of making sense of their actions and her role in making sense to then talk about answering questions. Did this mean she understood questions and thinking, in terms of how she understood relationships? This conversation ended with her saying the following,

> Cheyenne: And then as soon as I get closer and closer, then Miss Elliot would be like the big person. And I would eat the checker person, that would be me.
>
> Shaun: Yes.
>
> Cheyenne: So it kind of taught me that’s how I worked to my goals. Like moving up.
>
> Shaun: Yes.
>
> Cheyenne: And then if somebody ate that I’d just keep going up with another person and stuff so it kind of would work out that to me. So I’ve used checkers as like a thinking game for me. (taped conversation, January 15, 2003)

Talking about checkers as a way to describe practical ways of being at school was also a way of describing embodied ways of knowing. Her movement in the class in terms of relationships was not about up or down. It was not about eating people, it is a way of consuming an opponent's checker pieces and therefore eating is a way of explaining interactions with others from the perspective of the body. We know what it is to consume food through our mouths and Cheyenne understood that getting questions done and avoiding potential adversaries in the class was about consuming the questions and, if not consuming individuals, certainly consuming their ability to disrupt her.

While Cheyenne clearly illustrated a moment of embodied knowledge, much of my work with her centred on relational and practical knowledge. Like Leo, Cheyenne's story to live by was strongly influenced by her family. However, the difference between the two lay in how Cheyenne's sisters helped her make sense in school. The stories she told about school often involved her family. Although his family influenced Leo in his understanding of school, Cheyenne was more specific in talking about her family's influence on her story to live by in school. Her Sloughboy name, One-who-stands-among, clearly positioned her within relationships with family, friends, and Lian. Knowing herself as a member of a community was a strong element in her story to live by.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Travis

Like Cheyenne, I met Travis in the June before I began my research. This occurred on the June day when the students switched classes in order to find out who their teacher would be the following year. He did not stand out in the classroom, but at recess when I went out on supervision with Lian we met. He walked beside Lian as we wandered around the playground.

> Travis hung very close to us. Later Lian told me that she taught some of the kids when they were in Grades one and two. Travis is one of these students. Lian has a special feeling for him from working with him those two years and because she feels protective of him. You can tell he feels close to her in the way he hugs her and hangs around. Travis responds to the way people care for him in school and she mentions that going to junior high might be tough on him. As we walk through the field he stays right by her side. (notes to file, June 15, 2002)

It was obvious from their closeness on the playground and the brief information I recorded from our conversation that Lian cared about Travis. It was equally obvious that Travis was fond of her. Lian told me she wanted Travis in her room. She was so certain of this that she went to the office to request him and when she found out that he had already been placed on the register of another class she had him moved into her class. In a later conversation with Travis he told me he wished and wished that Miss Elliot would be his teacher and how happy he was when it all worked out. In September I observed the classroom. I had not started talking with the children yet. This wouldn't happen until

November. I noted on that day “as students [arrived in class] Travis came up to Lian and gave her a hug. … At the end of the day Travis had come to shake my hand before he left and on the way out the door he had hugged Lian”(notes to file, September 6, 2002). Travis was obvious in his affection for Lian and his shaking of my hand indicated he was becoming more comfortable with me. By the middle of September I was already beginning to imagine with whom I might work and Travis was one of the students. This was based on his history with Lian, his comfortableness with me, and the story that existed of him on the school landscape. This story was about Travis being cared for by other teachers with whom he had worked. I did not yet know what this meant, but I was intrigued by what sense he might make of it.

In November we began to work together. In our first conversation Travis talked about peaceful places. In a field note I captured a sense of our conversation.

> We went back to class and I asked Travis if he wanted to come and talk with me. He talked a lot about peaceful places in school and at home. Places where it is typically quiet and people are working or at home when he is on his own like at the park when no one else is there or he is riding his bike. We talked about life in Grades 1/2 and 5/6 and working with Lian in both settings. He told me about his room at his dad’s and how it was peaceful because he didn’t have to share a wall with hardly anyone so that he couldn’t hear them say if they hit the wall. (notes to file, November 20, 2002)

I was intrigued by his comments about peaceful places. Travis was a quiet boy. Often during our conversations I had to ask him to speak louder. In the classroom he was also quiet. He was not a child who distracted others and he did not seem distracted from his work very often. My memory of Travis in the room was a quiet boy watching others; a boy who often hugged his teacher and, surprisingly, one who began to hug me when he entered the room and I was there to work. I had this sense of Travis sitting in his desk, being peaceful, and watching others. In our conversation I came to understand his desire for peace.

Peaceful places: In and out of school

On this day we started our conversation talking about his history at school. Ravine Elementary was the only school he had ever attended. We talked about the difference between life in Grades 1/2 with Lian and life in Grades 5/6. I asked him about Lian in the different grades and he told me she probably preferred Grades 1/2 because there were fewer hassles.

Shaun: Do you think she likes it better than Grade 1 and Grade 2?

Travis: No.

Shaun: No? Do you think she likes Grade 1 and Grade 2 better? How come?

Travis: Because Grade 6s and 5s are a hassle.

Shaun: Oh you think so?

Travis: Like more hassle and, and when you're in like Grade 2 and 1 you just like listen because you think that she's going to like, like the teacher's going to like do something.

> Shaun: So what comment, when you say that Grade 5 and Grade 6 are, are hassles, tell me something, what do you mean by that? What do they do that's a hassle?
>
> Travis: Well like they don't usually listen....They like, like to do, like make fun of people and all that. Like to do their own thing ... [w]hat they want to ....Um, they like to get in trouble sometimes. (taped conversation, November 20, 2002)

This was significant because this conversation led to his memory of the school being more beautiful when he was in Grades 1 and 2 because it was newer and there were more flowers around the ravine next to the school. We continued our conversation about life in school and as we talked about the different spaces in the school he told me that one of his favourite spaces was the art room because that was where it is peaceful and quiet because there they just work.

He then told me how he liked to ride his bike around when he was at home to find peaceful places.

> Travis: At home, when I'm playing, like riding my bike without anybody else. When I'm walking alone. Um, when I'm at the park, like if nobody else is there. Um, playing sometimes.
>
> Shaun: Do you like being by yourself? How come?
>
> Travis: Because, because it's peaceful. (taped conversation, November 20, 2002)

I was curious why peaceful places were so important for him and although he never told me outright he did suggest that it was not peaceful around his brothers and sister and that the classroom is noisy. When I asked him to define peaceful his response was that peaceful means "quiet … not like running and all that … like just … like quietness" (taped conversation, November 20, 2002).

Before and after school Travis attended a day-care he had attended since he was a young boy. His mother started her job early in the morning and so they were often at the day-care by 6:30 am. He attended after school, but because of the early start his mom was usually there shortly after 4:00 pm. Travis did not like the day-care. He was one of the eldest children who attend and I suspect one with the longest history of attendance. He told me there were 120 children who attend the day-care. When I went to see him at the day-care in the summer after our year together, there were not 120 children in care. There was not room for 120 children. In fact on the day I was there, on his side of the day-care, the side for older children, there were no more than 10 children. His use of the number 120 indicated that for him there was no space in the day-care, there was no peace.

When I told him I was from a large family myself and as a child I liked to get away from my family into quieter spaces I inadvertently began a pattern that would emerge in our relationship. Travis saw this as indicative of how we were similar. In later conversation there were a number of times when he told me we were alike in our stories of childhood. In many cases we had similar stories. The story of looking for peacefulness was one of them.

Sloughboy and Travis

The grass says there is a new person at the edge of the slough ... another boy like you but not like you.

Do you know him? they ask in the whisper of the wind that stirs them.

Sloughboy knows no other like himself. Is that possible he thinks that someone might be like him? He must know and he slips through the willows and around pools of water to the place where this new person is standing. Sloughboy looks at him. Watches him walking along the edge of the slough. Indeed he is like him. He is about the same size and this is a novelty for him.

He sees what the grass understands. But they do not look the same. They look different. Cravenbeast appears at his side. He feels the bony push of the beast's nose. Sloughboy steps out and the other boy sees him. They stand there looking at each other. In seeing ~ they have met. But in not hearing ~ they have not yet met. Sloughboy thinks about this other in terms of his own. He sees someone like him but not like him. Does he live in a place of his own? Does he have companions like Sloughboy does? Where is his bony beast? Why has this other boy, is that the right word ... boy ... come to the slough? Sloughboy steps forward and the other boy steps back. The boy steps forward, Sloughboy stands still.

Hello, says the other boy.

Is this what my voice sounds like? thinks Sloughboy. I had not thought it to sound like this ... and then the other boy smiles and says his name is Travis. He has come looking for quiet spaces.

Quiet thinks Sloughboy. He looks around, the grass is whispering.

The birds talk, frogs sing, insects hum.

This is surely not a quiet place he thinks to himself. Then he wonders ... does this boy, this Travis come from a place of more noise? What is a place like that that would have things that make more noise than these noisy acquaintances of his in the slough? Sloughboy cocks his head and looks at this Travis sideways. He does not change noticeably although he does see that his hair is a different colour in different places.

Do you want to play? Travis asks.

Play, muses Sloughboy. I do not know this thing about play. He looks up at the sky and thinks about play. He wonders what play might look like or feel like. What would he have to do to play?

Or we could hang out, Travis says next.

Sloughboy is trying to figure out what this boy is saying. He knows how to hang. He hangs from Cravenbeast all the time. To hang out somewhere else they would have to leave the slough. There is no place in this place to hang out in. They *would have to leave the bounds of the slough, of his home. He would have to go somewhere new with this strange like-him-not-him person.*

Do you play here a lot? asks Travis.

Finally Sloughboy says, play, aloud.

You know run around and find things.

Sloughboy knows about this and he nods. Sloughboy is realizing he needs to find a new way to be with this new person. He takes a risk.

Let me show you the slough, he says.

Travis steps into the slough and walks alongside Sloughboy. Sloughboy shows him his places in the slough. The best place to swim. His favourite resting and thinking place. A spot where he can hear the best stories the grass tell. He does not show him Cravenbeast. Somehow he knows that the great skeletal beast will scare this-timid-not-timid boy. There are things he is beginning to know about this Travis.

He watches and does not speak often.

He seems shy and yet not shy.

Perhaps he is just careful, but he also seems to want to play ~ although Sloughboy is still not sure of this word play. Travis smiles and looks at everything. At the swimming place he looks at the water and asks in disbelief if Sloughboy really swims in it. Sloughboy looks at the water. It looks like water to him. He *wonders at Travis' thinking about the water. Why would he think differently about the water than Sloughboy? It is the deepest widest place in the slough. Of course he swims here ... this is his home. Some days Sloughboy swims in this pool of water for hours. He can swim through the grasses at the edge and around the hump of grass and willow in the middle. Sloughboy knows how to swim easily in this pool. He could swim its course with his eyes shut and sometimes he does and on hot nights he swims in the dark with only stars above him. He looks sideways at Travis again. Sideways looking has always helped Sloughboy. Straight-ahead looking only shows him what he wants to look at ... sideways looking is ... well ... sideways looking. This look told him that Travis would not swim in this water. The next time Sloughboy swims he will think about this not swimming in this pool.*

Do you want to play hide and seek? Travis asks out of his silence and Sloughboy's wondering.

What is hide and seek?

Now it is Travis' turn to look at him sideways. Sloughboy sees this and wonders if Travis looks sideways for the same reasons he does. Sloughboy, doing his own sideways looking, sees Travis trying to figure out how to tell him.

One of us hides and the other comes to find him, he tells Sloughboy.

Why?

Because it is fun.

Sloughboy knows about fun. Fun is swimming in his pool, riding Cravenbeast fast, listening to the silly stories the grass tell about their boring cousins the poplar. This will be a new fun for him.

I will hide first, says Travis as he walks away ... after a few paces he turns and sees Sloughboy staring at him. Don't look, he says.

How will I know where to find you? asks Sloughboy. This playing is a funny thing with strange ways thinks Sloughboy.

Well that's the fun ... you won't know where to find me and the fun part will be when you do.

OK.

Sloughboy closes his eyes and waits until he can no longer hear Travis and then he waits a little longer. Then he opens them and looks around. He cannot see Travis anywhere. He lies down and whispers to grass asking where did the one like me go. The grass parts a trail for Sloughboy, which he follows to Travis' hiding place. Travis is surprised to see him so soon.

How did you find me?

I asked grass, says Sloughboy pointing to grass.

Travis looks at grass and says, You asked grass?

Yes, and grass showed me how to get to you.

Weird, is his response. OK next time do not ask grass only find me on your own. Sloughboy sees Travis look sideways at grass.

It will be more fun this way.

Sloughboy nods and closes his eyes again and waits.

Then he begins to look for Travis. Without the help of grass he cannot find him easily. He looks in clumps of willow. He walks to the edge of the slough. Where can Travis be he wonders? Then he thinks of Coyote following Rabbit. Coyote knows Rabbit is hard to catch, but catching Rabbit is more rewarding than catching Mouse. Sloughboy thinks about how Coyote acts when he seeks Rabbit and he decides that is how he will act to find Travis. He begins to crawl around the slough pretending to be Coyote. This is fun. Coyote will be surprised next time he sees Sloughboy and Sloughboy pretends to be him. Coyote will think this is a good joke and he will laugh with Sloughboy. Maybe Travis will laugh when he sees Sloughboy pretending to be Coyote. Maybe this is play thinks Sloughboy. Then out of the corner of his eye he sees, with his sideways seeing, something that is not slough. Like Coyote he goes still to see sideways better. There in the corner of his eye is the something. Slowly he turns to be able to see what he is looking at in a straight-ahead way. There is Travis. Sloughboy goes very still. Travis has not seen him. Travis is trying to make himself very small ... so small. Sloughboy smiles. Travis knows how to hide. Sloughboy begins the almost ready to catch you dance he has *seen Coyote dance many times. He quiet ~ oh so quietly ~ crawls to Travis' spot. He gets so close. Travis is rabbit-twitchy. He knows I am looking for him but he does not know where I am. Hide and seek is a both-ways game thinks Sloughboy. Travis is hiding but he is also at the same time seeking. Sloughboy watches Travis from close. Travis in his not looking has let Sloughboy get close. Sloughboy waits a moment like he has seen Coyote do ... Coyote always waits a moment. Sloughboy can feel excitement build in his body. He realizes this is fun ... this hide and seek both-ways game. He did not realize it had this part to it ~ this hiding and finding at the same time. Sloughboy is now hiding from Travis, but not for long and with that thought he pounces like Coyote pounces.*

Travis yells.

The yell makes Sloughboy jump back and fall down.

The Travis yell makes Sloughboy yell.

Then in the silence after Travis starts to laugh and Sloughboy starts to laugh. They recognize each other. This laughter is a way of talking ~ just like it is a way of talking with Coyote. I like this play thinks Sloughboy.

You scared me.

You scared me back.

Now you go and hide.

And Sloughboy runs and jumps and twists and finds a rabbit-y place to hide in and pretend to be rabbit-like who is hiding from Coyote and pretending to be Rabbit makes Sloughboy twitchy and wanting to be smaller so he curls up smaller. As he lies there curled up smaller he realizes that in this position he cannot seek Travis, but he does not want to. He wants to be scared again and so he lies there until like before the pounce of Travis makes him jump up yelling, only this time Travis does not yell back he just starts laughing.

Thinking about Sloughboy and Travis

This Sloughboy piece about Travis told me many things about my research relationship with him. It began with our conversation about peaceful places. This was based on the taped conversations we had during the year. This Sloughboy piece was also about my research relationship with Travis. I used the idea of a game of hide and seek to capture an important part of what it was like to work with him. Often in our conversations I found myself working hard to find out what he meant. I do not imply that he was hiding things in our conversations, but I was seeking them never-the-less. When I reread the transcripts and compared them with the transcripts of the other children, his transcripts show one-line questions or comments from me, and one-line responses from him. Compared to the other children, he was less detailed in his responses — therefore, our game of hide and seek. Travis also made me feel rabbit-twitchy as a researcher because he pushed at my understanding of my role as a researcher. He was not overt in this and never did I have a sense that he was intentional. Rather, this was a feeling I developed on my own.

Part of this was because he often talked about his family, a subject I tried to stay away from in order to maintain the privacy of the family of the research participants and because it was not part of the research puzzle. I was interested in children's knowledge of school, not their knowledge of home. However, like Cheyenne, Travis often talked about home. The difference between the two was that Travis' stories often had more places of tension in them. These places of tension made me rabbit-twitchy. I think my responses to him where I shared stories of my own childhood grew out of my feelings of tension. I wanted to make clear that my life had places of tension too. It was a way of saying we were not so different. It was a way of honouring the research relationship and keeping it even handed. As I read the transcripts I saw it as a way of maintaining a balance in our sharing stories.

This hide and seek element in the research relationship did not go away either. It was not part of the establishment of the relationship, but a part of it throughout the year. What I mean to say is that there was not a sense of this at the start of our conversations together, but rather it emerged as the relationship deepened. It was not an expression of comfort or playfulness in each other's presence, but a component of the conversation about questions I had about school. Travis and I talked around many big stories and it was in the spaces in the conversations or the entire conversation that I could see what we were talking about. A common element of the conversations entailed not telling Lian about what we had spoken. The other thread was his hesitation to tell his mother he was speaking with me. Even though parents had signed forms agreeing to the research and I had sent home letters to the parents of the children I was taping conversations with, I asked them all to remind their parents that we were talking. Eventually he did remind his mother and it was a moot point. Making sure I kept things secret was important to Travis. Just as he sought out peaceful places, he did not want to inject tension into the relationships he had with others, even if it was obvious they both had a sense of those tensions. I had to negotiate with him around this issue to be able to write about some things. Other things remained a secret. Because of this I do not give details, but talk about them in a general sense, discussing the themes that arose in our conversations.

This is a private conversation

Travis liked talking with me. He was also protective of our space. He did not want to tell his mom about our conversations. He wanted to control the space and how people knew, or was often the case, didn't know. He told me once that he was hesitant to tell his mom because if her friends found out they would "come to me and say, 'Ha, ha, you're' well they would come to me and tell me that I'm talking with people and all that" (taped conversation, January 22, 2003). I wondered if this response might reflect some of the tensions he had with his family. There were tensions between his mom and the school and perhaps this might indicate other tensions in his life around his family. As far as I knew no one ever mocked him for his participation. When he did finally remind his mom that we were talking, her response to him was that it was "cool" (taped conversation, June 3, 2003).

When I asked him if other children ever asked him about our conversations he told me of one instance near the beginning of our conversations together. In the moment he recounted he had returned to the classroom after our first conversation together.

Shaun: … OK. Um that made me think of something. Does anybody in the class ever talk to you about coming out to talk to me?

Travis: Hmmm, no.

Shaun: No?

Travis: The first time that I went with you

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: Ah somebody asked, "Where were you?" and I said, "With Mr. Murphy." And he or she said, "Why?" and then I said, "For no reason."

Shaun: OK. Um and do the other kids ever say anything about it since then?

Travis: No. (taped conversation, February 11, 2003)

In this instance I understood Travis was saying he wanted to keep our conversations private, but he also wanted them to remain special. To challenge this idea I asked him if he knew that I took other children out of class to talk with. He thought that maybe I talked with Catrina and then he recalled that I also talked with Cheyenne. I had to remind him I also spoke with Leo and Erica. He was comfortable with this information and moved on in the conversation to ask me if I would tell him any more stories of when I was young.

The most telling moment of keeping the conversation private was the day he encountered a place of great tension with Lian over his unfinished work. Prior to this

Lian had begun to express concern over whether it had been a good choice to work with Travis again. Her concern arose out of the shift in what school was from Grades 1/2 to Grade 5. She wondered if she was the best teacher for him. This came to a head one day when she had to reprimand him for his work habits and impose consequences. That day, when I arrived in class Lian told me I might like to talk to Travis because of what had happened. Part of this stemmed from her concern over having to shift their relationship in such a dramatic way and she wanted him to be able to talk to someone about it. She also thought I might be interested in his perspective on what had occurred.

As we began our conversation I told Travis Miss Elliot had told me about their conflict. His response took me by surprise.

> Shaun: So I'm going to tell you why I am, because you're probably thinking, "He just talked to me yesterday, why am I here again?" Because Miss Elliot told me what happened after recess yesterday. That she sort of read you the riot act about your work and stuff and you nod. So tell me about that. And don't worry about, you don't have to like worry about Miss Elliot because she told me, right so. And she knows what she did.
>
> Travis: See, that's hard.
>
> Shaun: That's hard? OK tell me why that's hard.
>
> Travis: Because it's hard.
>
> Shaun: Why?
>
> Travis: I don't know.
>
> Shaun: Is it hard to talk about Miss Elliot that way?

Travis: Yeah. (taped conversation, February 13, 2003)

This was hard because Miss Elliot made sure Travis is safe. In their relationship he felt cared for and in the moment before recess this had all changed in Travis' mind. She had made him so troubled by the exchange that he wanted to move to another school. This was what he wanted me to keep private. By the end of the conversation it was no longer an issue. It was a long conversation to get to that place though.

My sense was Travis felt betrayed by what had transpired. What he did not know was the anguish behind Lian's decision to confront him in the straightforward manner she had chosen. This was not the first time she mentioned missed work to him. She had talked about it before without success. This hard conversation for Lian came from the need to help him be prepared for school, for Grade 6, for junior high. She worried she might not have been the best choice for him as a teacher for this school year, but from watching them together this year and talking to them both I think this confrontation, coming as it did from a place of relationship, was the right place for Travis to confront issues around his work at school.

These concerns Travis had about privacy stemmed from his desire to protect his relationships with others. This indicated his understanding in school was centred on relationship. His love for Lian was evident, his friends were important to him, and our research relationship was part of knowing in school. In our conversations and my observations I had come to think that Travis was quiet in order to maintain his relationships. He did not like to trouble his relationships, he wanted them to exist without tension.

His history of narrative knowledge

Travis told me a story, a story I could never imagine happening in my experience of childhood. It is a story he partly remembers and one his brother told him. Temporally it was a brief episode, but narratively it was much larger and long lasting. In our conversation on that November day we called it a big story. I told him his story was a big story to have in your head. He told me he had had it since he was five years old and it was scary to have it in your head and he had been trying to get it out. I asked him how he tried to get it out and he responded,

Travis: It's history. Um, like I try to think of something else than thinking of that. Then it just always like pushes the other thing I don't think, trying to think away.

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: And then it makes me think of that. And then the other thing that I was thinking of pushes it away and then it's like a fight in my head.

Shaun: Yeah? Can you get rid of history?

Travis: Not to me, no.

Shaun: No? No?

Travis: I don't think so.

Shaun: I don't think so either.

Travis: Because ancient Greece is history and …

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: And people still haven't got it away you know. (taped conversation, November 29, 2002)

Travis was only ten years old, twice what he was when the big story found a place in his history. It was amazing to me that he took his experience in class of studying ancient Greece and applied it to his understanding of personal history. In the future Travis and I returned to the idea of having a big story, but in this moment we moved into a discussion of the histories people had in school.

Histories of being in school

He began with his own history of being in Grade 4 and hoping to get Lian for a teacher again when he went to Grade 5. He told me "I always said, 'Please let me go in Miss Elliot's class. Please, please, please." Then he discovered he had been placed in another teacher's room, but the next day Lian came to him and said, "'Travis you're coming in my room now.' I'm just like, 'You saved my life.'" Her response was "How did I do that?" and he says, "I don't know" (taped conversation, November 29, 2002). This wish was based on his history with her and his desire to be with a known teacher.

He told me that he had a history with other children in the school, some of whom he had been with since Kindergarten. Some of the people he told me about are people he continued to be friends with, boys he played with at recess and goes to their homes after school. His history of the school helped him know where different rooms were and who taught in them. He talked about teachers who used to be at the school. He talked about the placement of pictures on the wall differing from grade to grade and then he told me

Ravine Elementary used to be a farm and a window out of the old farmhouse hangs by the office door.

Travis talked about changes in teachers and how that influenced the life of a school, but he did so from the perspective of a child hoping for a certain teacher saying if a teacher left and you wanted to work with that teacher it wouldn't be fair they had gone. I asked him to say more about this and he told me you might be wishing for that teacher "desperately" and if you didn't get her or him "It would change [your] life totally pretty much I think" (taped conversation, November 29, 2002). Curious what this might mean I asked him to explain what life would have been like if you did get that teacher, "I think it would be the same like how it was earlier" (taped conversation, November 29, 2002).

Travis did not seem to want change in his relationships in school. My sense was he was happy with the way things were and the way they had been. This was due in part to the smooth story he had of school. He did not talk about tensions in his history of school beyond the tension of not knowing Lian would be his teacher the following year. When he entered into a place of tension with Lian over the unfinished work he wanted to change schools. Changing schools was his first reaction to this tension, although as we moved through the conversation about this moment of tension he realized that moving schools was not the answer.

History was also a way for Travis to be a good friend. He talked in November about having a history with some of the children in his class. In a more personal conversation about history he told me knowing an individual's history "told me more about their life ....[s]o that I can be better friends with them ... [b]ecause you know more of their history" (taped conversation, December 12, 2002). Being a good friend was important to Travis just as being a good student was important. Living without tension was part of this, but being caring is another part. Travis' point was history was a part of nested knowledge in relationships with friends and teachers.

History in nested knowledge

Travis and I, like the other children in the inquiry, had direct conversations about nested knowledge. His conversations about relationship and, therefore, relational knowledge seemed to move in and out of nested knowledge. Nested knowledge cannot be discussed without the context of relationship. It was a different way of looking at relationships, a fracture within a fracture of personal knowledge.

So much of what he talked about in his relationship with Lian could also be thought about in terms of nested knowledge. Their history together provided a basis for understanding Travis as a learner and for Travis to understand Lian as a teacher. This meant they had a history of knowing each other as knowers in the context of school. With the five main children in this inquiry Lian had a history of teaching them all for one or more years in the past. In the case of Cheyenne, this history extended into places outside of school and to a history of teaching an older sibling. For Travis this history meant she understood him personally and academically.

His understanding of how she knows him as a knower meant she knew he liked sports, that he was "sporty." When I asked him more pointed questions he told me she would know that he was not good at math. When I asked what this would mean to her as a teacher his response was she would give him more sheets to make him better at it. Pushing at this I brought their history into the conversation and he told me she had known him "[f]or my whole life" (taped conversation, December 12, 2002). Lian had not known him for his whole life and Travis qualifies that statement with "[i]n this school she's known me."

Lian had known Travis for his whole life in school. She knew his mom, brother, and sister. He thought that knowing his family would help him, "maybe." Then the history of Travis as a knower entered into the conversation.

> Shaun: Because I'm thinking that if you know someone's history, because you said the word history last week, if you know someone's history does that help them know you better? How come?
>
> Travis: Because um like it's kind of easy because if you're not good in math at like Grade 1 or 2 … Then she can tell that you might not be good at math in Grade 3, 4, 5, 6 or … Higher grades. And um science same thing.
>
> Shaun: What about things you're good at? Does she know some things you're good at besides sports?
>
> Travis: Gym.
>
> Shaun: And besides gym.
>
> Travis: Science. (taped conversation, December 12, 2002)

Here Travis indicated his past successes and struggles are something Lian would know about and accommodate in their current relationship. She would be able to assist him in math based on his past performance, even though that performance was of a boy in Grade 2. What was significant for Travis was that this was important. He had a history of struggling with math and he imagined that Lian would remember and help him in their current context. He also knew that being good at science was something he had always been good at and his shared history with Lian would help her to know that about him as well. When I asked, "Why do you think teachers need to know things about their kids?" he told me, "So that they can help them on their like report cards, um, e-mail people like how good these people are and all that" (taped conversation, December 12, 2002). This made him safe academically. Now that bears some thinking, nested knowledge helps people know "how good these people are and all that."

Holding a big story

Travis was a boy who held a big story of life in his head. It was a story composed of history, many characters, and various landscapes. We all have big stories in our heads. For some, however, their big story may demand more attention than others experience with their stories. For Travis this was the case sometimes. When we first talked about having a big story he used the words, "I try to think of something else … pushes the other thing … it's like a fight in my head" (taped conversation, November 29, 2002). Travis never indicated to me that this was a constant process in which he was involved. It was not a constant presence in our conversation, but it did come up.

When I asked him to explain more about having a big story he gave me the example of his grandfather's recent death, Shaun: Um so do you have a really, do you have a story right now that is like an important story in your life that's a big story? Yeah?

Travis: About my grandpa.

Shaun: So when your grandpa died. That's the one?

Travis: I didn't really like it when he died because before …

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: When I didn't go to his funeral like before like the days before the funeral …

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: My stomach was really, really in pain.

Shaun: Yeah. And were you …

Travis: I don't know why that happens. (taped conversation, April 10, 2003)

Travis gave me no examples of how he dealt with this story and when I asked him if there were other stories he reminded me of the first story he told that precipitated the theme of big stories. Then he told me he thought about his family smoking and the recent departure of his stepbrother from his dad and stepmother's house. These things impinged on the emotional and physical health of his family. They indicated his level of concern for them. When I asked him if he liked this stepbrother he told me no, that his stepbrother would hassle Travis when his stepbrother was babysitting him. When I asked if he told anyone about this he told me no because he wasn't comfortable telling anyone.

Shaun: So are you glad that he's gone now?

Travis: Kind of.

Shaun: Yeah. Did you get really nervous when you had to go and stay with him?

Travis: Yeah.

Shaun: Yeah? So did you carry that story around in your head?

Travis: Yeah.

Shaun: Or did you only carry that story around in your head when you were sort of by him?

Travis: When I was by him [or] at school sometimes.

Shaun: Yeah. So when you start thinking about that story does it make you think stop thinking about school?

Travis: No. (taped conversation, April 10, 2003)

These stories did not make him stop thinking about school, but if I consider his previous words, they compete for attention. They get in the way of getting his work done even though he may still be thinking about school.

Shaun: Um do you think that happens to kids? Do you think they get stories in their heads that get in the way with school?

Travis: Yeah.

Shaun: And, and then what happens?

Travis: They just don't get their, they don't get their work done and they get a lot of homework and then they don't do it because they're stuck up with that story … .[a]nd then they forget to do their homework.

Shaun: Mmmhmm.

> Travis: Like me once … [w]ell a couple times that happened … [a]nd I got back to school and the teacher was not, was not happy. (taped conversation, April 10, 2003)

I began to think, as Travis spoke, that some people walk around with many stories in their head, competing for attention and getting in the way of the sacred story of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). My sense of the sacred story in this context was we should be able to put aside all those other stories that do not help us at school. I think the sacred story was often constructed on the premise that children come to school with minds full of spaces waiting to be filled by a story of school, stories of behaviour, good work habits, and information that leads to knowledge. Travis was telling me the opposite; sometimes the stories in your head leave no space for the work of school. This was one of the secret stories of school, and when you are ten, how do you create a cover story? Travis does have people in his life who help him with these stories. Cheyenne came up to him when she found out about his grandfather's death and told him she was sorry. She was the only child to do so and he was grateful for it. She told him "don't worry, It's OK." And when I asked him why she did this he responded "because she cares for me" (taped conversation, February 12, 2003). He also had a moment with Lian where their stories of experience intersect. This piece of conversation occurred when Travis and I were talking about teachers sharing stories of their life outside of school. Lian always started the week with a conversation about what they did on the weekend. After the children shared, she always shared a story from her own weekend. For Travis this was an indication of her love for them. He then gives a personal example of her love for him, Travis: Because she helps me solve my problems.

Shaun: Tell me something about that.

Travis: When my grandpa died …

Shaun: Yeah.

Travis: I was crying when I was in class and then she'd say, she'd, she told me that one of her uncles or grandpas had cancer and she didn't want to tell any, she told me not to tell anybody else in the class.

Shaun: And what did you feel like when she told you that?

Travis: Sad for her. (taped conversation, April 10, 2003)

I don't know if knowing your teacher loves and cares for you is part of the sacred story children have of school, but in this instance it helped Travis make sense of a big story in his head. It was also a moment of nested knowledge. It made a shift in Travis' experience of Lian. Her stories of the weekend were not stories of sadness, they were stories of entertainment, of her dog, or a tale of her family. The stories the children told about their weekends were much the same. This quiet, private moment was in keeping with the relational Travis I knew from our conversations. In my mind I saw him taking this piece of Lian's story and putting it somewhere in his mind where he could take it out and use it as he made sense of his own story to live by in school and the world.

Travis gets his name

Sloughboy is in one of his favourite peaceful places, the birch grove. He is spending the morning waiting for Travis. He woke up knowing his friend would come *to the slough today. He is not surprised when he hears a quiet, greeting from behind him.*

He turns and smiles at his hide and seek friend. There is no rabbit-twitching in either one of them today. There is only sunlight between the trees, bird song, and two boys.

I knew I would find you in here, Travis told him.

I knew you would so I came to wait here for you.

If this surprises Travis he shows no sign. Travis is like that, Sloughboy decides: He has many secret stories in him, and he does not show them to the world.

Did you come looking for a peaceful place? Sloughboy asks.

Travis nods and sits beside him with his back resting on the oldest birch. I remembered this place you brought me to and I think it is one of the most peaceful places I know. The other place is in the ravine by my house. I play in there by myself and with my brother and a friend sometimes. I ride my bike there, we build forts, and I go there to be peaceful.

Sloughboy asks, Don't you have a ravine by your school too?

Yes, replies Travis. It was more beautiful when I was younger. More flowers grew in it and we would go there with our teacher sometimes.

The teacher who loves you?

Yes, we would go there with her.

Why is it not beautiful now?

Oh, I think it still is, I just remember more flowers when I was younger. The ravine makes my school more beautiful. People go down there you know. They go running and they walk their dogs.

Is it like the slough? asks Sloughboy.

Kind of and kind of not. It is a break in the ground kind of like this where the land falls away into a deeper place. It isn't as wet though and there are more trees everywhere.

Is there some water?

6

Yes in the ravine by the school there is a stream and in the ravine by my house there is a stream, but it is only really a stream in the spring.

That is like my place, says Sloughboy. There is always more water here in the spring. Then the slough is like a lake. Lots of water, lots of ducks, and the grass cannot be seen. I go swimming in all that water and float on my back for days.

I don't go in the streams in the ravines. I am not allowed, but I play by them and float things in them.

Why don't you play in them?

Because I have to be careful. If I am not careful I will get into trouble and I won't be allowed to go into them anymore. Not that I'm allowed in the school *ravine without a teacher anyway, I mean the one by my house. I think of the school ravine though. I think about it a lot. I think about it looking like my ravine at home and I wish I could go into it at school sometimes.*

Why?

Because if I could I could go to a peaceful place away from people when I am at school. That would be a good thing. When I go to a peaceful place the stories in my head get sleepy and I forget about them.

Do you want to forget about your stories?

Some of them. Some of them I don't need to have. They get in the way of other stories. Being somewhere where there is quiet makes them quieter.

I like my quiet slough, says Sloughboy.

I know you do, replies Travis, I like it too. It makes us kind of the same.

What do you mean? asks Sloughboy.

We both like quiet places, we both like the water, we are both boys, and we both have lots of stories in our heads, and, he points at the stick, you have lots of stories on your stick.

You are one of those stories, says Sloughboy.

I know, says Travis, remember I was the one who carried it all the way back to you.

I remember, says Sloughboy, see here, and he points to a place on the stick. The stick remembers too.

And Travis can see his story shifting across the surface of the piece of wood and then it is gone. Where did it go?

Didn't go anywhere, it's still there, you just can't see it right now.

And Travis sits back against the birch and the two boys sit in the quiet slough. We are alike, says Sloughboy.

I know, says Travis.

We just have different names.

I know, says Travis.

Because of the places we love, says Sloughboy.

Oh.

Yes. says Sloughboy, I know your name now.

What is it?

Ravineboy.

Sloughboy is Sleeping

Sloughboy is sleeping. This is his long sleep. The one he cannot avoid and therefore tumbles into, burrowing deep inside his dreams. He does not wish to avoid this land of dreams for it rests his mind and body in ways he does not understand.

He does not move except to twitch. If you could see his face you would see that his eyes are open. Even asleep he fears he might miss something so he watches from deep inside his dreams. As he sleeps this time he is suspended in the frozen water. Here is the boy trapped inside the ice. Can you see him some depth down? Can you make out the dim form in the frozen murk? What you cannot make out is what he sees as he hovers in his icy sleep. Ringed around him are the children. Boy-who-would be seen, One-who-stands-among, Certain-girl-shifting, Ghost-girl-who-knows, and Travis —the boy who no longer guards his name. They are there and of course they are not there ... they are never there together except in the mind of Sloughboy, except in his dreams and in this sleep he is dreaming them. Dreaming to know. Sloughboy sleeps the dream of the body. He sleeps the sleep of metaphor. He dances frozen in place. He stands among in his icy bed. He shifts as he dreams knowing new things as the ghosts of the world above drift through his mind. He who has never been guarded wonders at the reasons one might need to be so, and still it is beyond his grasp, beyond the murk of dreams, beyond the clarity of ice.

In this place he is alone. He cannot be reached by Cravenbeast. Oldest-living-life is as still as he and the grass are gone to their sleeping place. They talk only in muted voices through their roots and their roots do not enter the water. Coyote has wandered away and some days Sloughboy can see him sitting on the ice above watching him. In his dreams he thinks Coyote chuckles before he departs, *but this might just be memory and habit, Coyote always chuckles. Raven has flown down to watch him with cocked head and rounded eye. He knows he makes no sense to Raven, animal of the air. He likes to confuse Raven. He thinks it is wise to do so and therefore, listening to what he knows, he watches without blinking until Raven takes his rounded eye to wing and leaves him. Sloughboy lays entombed in order to understand the story of birch. For even though Sloughboy is still, he dreams of birch. The slow story of birch can only be understood when one is as slow as they. In this place he has the slowness with which to think and, so, he does.*

The memory of paper drifts across his fingertips. He slides a finger under, not lifting, but testing. He is no closer to the story the birch tell. He scales the branches of the thickest tree and sleeps in the crook of limbs far from the ground. He dreams that night of nothing. He is too far from the ground to dream his own stories and so he dreams of none. The birch do not give up their knowing so easily. He slides down the great tree, pleasure following him in his descent. The next night he burrows into the wide shallow roots of the birch. He twines himself around the thin roots and dreams this night.

He dreams of dry years and wet years.

He dreams of the new birch, some who live and some who sicken and die. He feels the pain of bark stripped from trunks and in this pain he also feels the giving of the gift. In his slumber he is sinuous. He awakens with the taste of dirt in his mouth but still no real sense of the story of birch.

Then he recalls the storyteller. He searches for the spot where the man stood and dropped the seed into the ground for Sloughboy is certain it could be nothing else. He discovers it near the oldest birch, a half rotten tree whose branches litter the ground while thin leaves reach tiredly to the sun. There among the dead dry branches is a new tree.

A straight tree. A tree with only a few
branches growing out
from
the trunk.

Sloughboy walks around it. It is no tree he has ever seen before. It is pale, however, pale like the birch, but not papery. Sloughboy takes a leaf and places it is his mouth. Then he knows. He strips all but the topmost branches from this new thing. Where he has broken them away the tree drips tears of sap. To shape is to cause pain.

To understand pain Sloughboy attempts to make cuts on his arms with the sharpest of the broken branches. But he does not bleed. The skin does not even break regardless of how hard he presses as he drags the limb across his own. The tree does not need him to understand its pain. It is not necessary. Sloughboy is *shaping his story tree. To understand the story of another, it is not necessary to live it.*

The wind blows across the icy pool where Sloughboy lays. He does not feel it. It makes no ripple but it continues to blow until it finds the story tree among the birch. With so few branches however it does not move in the wind. It stands resolutely in the presence of wind and gives up none of its stories. Sloughboy lies in the ice and gives up none of his. The children, those who watch the boy from above, leave and go to the story tree. They stand in a circle around it as they did the sleeping boy. One-who-stand-among tells them they must take the tree from the frozen ground and so Certain-girl-shifting and the Boy-who-would-be-seen pull it from the ground. Ghost-girl-who-knows steps forward and breaks off the roots and the remaining branches. Travis takes it from them and they follow him back to the icy pool where their friend lays in the murk. Together they grasp the not tree and plunge it into the ice and then they quickly step back. The surface of the pool cracks in long snaking lines and the water from below wells up into the air for it has missed the touch of sky. With it, it brings the boy who with his eyes open emerges into the air realizing he has missed it too. The children stand back as gasping Sloughboy grasps the not tree and stands, the murky water running from him and pooling in ice at his feet. He looks at them all and runs his hands over the not tree. He feels them there on its surface, in the places where they have laid their hands, *all but One-who-stands-among who had the knowing but not the touching and he passes it to her and she passes it back, her story grafted to this not tree. There they are, shifting across the memory of this wood. Gone and returned as he has been.*

CHAPTER NINE

Understanding the Knowledge of Children in School

While working with the children and Lian and then while writing about them I tried to remain aware of my story of self as a mediating force in understanding their stories of experience. At the beginning of this work I told the story of the day I climbed the hill behind my school with a cohort of friends. I suggested in that story that I would always be the boy ascending and descending Pirates' Hill and in some way making sense of the story of the boy who lived that moment. I wrote that I could not do an inquiry into that boy's experience of school because the memory of the boy was only accessible through the memories of the man. Therefore, in order to understand the stories of children in school I would need to work with children currently in school. This was how this inquiry took place. I spent a year working with children and their teacher in a school. However, I was also the boy on the hill. As I sit here writing about my learning in this inquiry I am able to conjure the boy on the hill in my thoughts and as I do so, I am struck by the thought that he has been present throughout the inquiry. By this I mean to imply that my understanding of the children in this inquiry is influenced by the boy on the hill, the boy I was in multiple classrooms, the teacher I became in other schools, being a researcher and the man in their classroom. Still, beyond all that, this is an inquiry into the storied lives of five children and their teacher in one classroom, in one school, in one western Canadian city.

When I began to imagine my research puzzle I thought about the ways children develop their understanding of school and I played with the idea of the knowledge landscape of children in school. In order to think about this landscape I fractured personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1962) into five kinds of knowledge. My thought was that children use narrative, practical, relational, embodied, and nested knowledge in school to understand their lives in school contexts. I still believe they do, but the understanding of all five kinds is ambitious and while there is some representation of each of them throughout the narratives of the children, I began to focus on three of the knowledges while conducting the inquiry.

Narrative knowledge in children's lives

A narrative inquiry has at its heart trying to think narratively, to understand the narrative knowledge of people. As a narrative inquirer I see people as individuals who lead storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I am influenced in my understanding of narrative (Bruner, 1990, 1991; Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Coles, 1989; Crites, 1971; Kerby, 1991; Mitchell, 1981; Richardson, 2002) as a way of understanding the lives of people. In this study I came to see narrative as the overarching manner in which all the participants talked about their lives in and out of school. Narrative knowledge is a way of knowing and a vehicle for the representation of knowledge. The research participants' knowledge of themselves in school was always presented in a narrative context. Their use of narrative knowledge was the way in which they "constituted reality" (Bruner, 1991, p. 5). As a researcher narrative knowledge is the way I constitute reality. My understanding of them was layered with my narratives of school as a child and adult, teacher, professional with an understanding of the sacred story of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Crites, 1971) and then beyond my own narratives I had the opportunity to see their stories in context with other children, their teachers and principals and, in some cases, the stories of their parents.

The children moved in and out of different plotlines as they talked about school. While the intent of the inquiry was to understand their knowledge of themselves in school contexts, their stories of home, family, friends, and out of school events shaped how they talked about school. Travis talked about the big stories he carried in his head and how they shaped his knowing of school stories. Cheyenne had a story of family that shaped her knowledge of school and how the story of sisters would shape her future story of life in junior high. Leo always had a family story to share, it would seem the way he made sense best in the world was with his family. For some of the children in the inquiry there was also the intersection of their stories of home with their story of Lian. Cheyenne and her family knew Lian socially and Erica's mother helped in the classroom and had a good relationship with Lian. Leo's mother often sent Lian gifts, which were delivered by Leo. All of the children talked about home at some point in the inquiry. This is interesting as my leading questions in the conversations always centred on school. It would seem that narratively, the children did not lead distinct in school and out of school lives. Their narrative knowledge of self moved in and out of many plotlines and in this inquiry about school talking about school also meant talking about their lives outside of it.

Interruptions in children's stories of school

Bruner (1991) named one feature of narrative as canonicity and breach. Canonicity refers to the culturally accepted stories of a group of people. For example there is a canonical script for behaviour in school for children and teachers. This might be described as an expression of the sacred story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Crites, 1971) of school and in Crites' terms he would name it a mundane story . In some of our conversations the children told stories that aligned them with the mundane story shaped by the sacred story of school. In other conversations the children or Lian told stories that breached the story of school. These breaches put them in conflict with the larger story of school. Sometimes the stories they told that were breaches of the canonical story of school were breaches known by others. They also told different stories not known by others. This breach of the canonical did not obviously have to be known by others in order to be an interruption in the sacred story of school. Known or unknown these stories shaped the participants' knowledge of themselves in the school context.

Cheyenne told the story of the teacher in her past who made no space for the sound of her voice. This can be seen as a breach or interruption in her story of school. In this breach Cheyenne had the support of her family who intervened without success in Cheyenne's story of school. In order to restore a smooth story of school, in order to return Cheyenne to a story of success in school the family moved to another school setting. In this place Cheyenne returned to a more smooth telling of school. Cheyenne told me this story in one of our conversations. It bears telling because it stepped outside or breached the canon of school stories in Cheyenne's life. Because of this breach it made for an interesting story. According to Bruner (1991),

> For to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to what Hayden White [1981] calls the "legitimacy" of the canonical script. (p. 11)

This interruption in Cheyenne's story of school in her second year was told in her sixth year. This is an important story in Cheyenne's narrative understanding of school and her self in school. It would seem Cheyenne cannot understand herself in Grade 6 without also knowing herself in Grade 2, in a different school, with a different teacher, and not clearly a different story of school.

A more immediate breach of a story of school was the breach Travis experienced with Lian during the year. This story was Travis' story of the support he had come to expect from teachers. This support was also a smooth story of being in school where he was not challenged severely in his story to live by in school. Travis had been living a story of the teacher as kind and nurturing. There are also stories, like Cheyenne's where the teacher was not kind. Certainly these two kinds of stories and many others exist about schools. Perhaps we, like Travis, choose the stories to which we subscribe.

The breach Travis experienced was a breach in his story of school and Lian. In his conversation with me he wanted to move schools as an immediate response to the breach. However, he moved away from this story outcome, falling back into his story of Lian. However, in the moment, and subsequently, it shifted his knowledge of school. Rather than a place of smooth stories with minimal conflict with others, he was confronted on his poor work habits and missed homework. In our conversation we talked about the roles of teachers and how this breach for Travis was also an acceptable plotline for teachers. By the end of our conversation Travis, although not happy with this turn in his school story, could see Lian's reasons for the confrontation. In this conversation, Travis did not talk about his new understanding of Lian without referring to his previous stories of relationship with her. Travis was not prepared to abandon his previous story of Lian; rather, he used it as a scaffold for this new knowledge. The scaffold worked as a way of understanding new knowledge and placing it within the narrative knowledge he already maintained about school and teachers.

Thinking about Erica's interrupted story of self in school

Out of the five children with whom I worked in this inquiry, Erica was the most overt in shifting her story of self in the classroom during the school year. In the narrative account of Erica, she is clear in her understanding of her story in school. She realized the story being told about her did not match the one she wished to live. I assumed her experience with peers from the previous year influenced her wish to maintain friendships with her friends in the current school year. In the previous year she aligned herself with Lian in order to feel safe at school. However, in this school year, that alignment had giving her the story of teacher's pet. In this situation, her peers initiated the interruption of Erica's story to live by in school. It bears considering the nature of interruptions in stories to live by in school. Where do these interruptions come from? What is the genesis of an interruption? How can we name the interruption and what might it mean to the storied lives of people in school?

Interrupted thoughts

I am in the middle of thinking about what this idea of interruption means in the stories of people in schools when I interrupt my work to read about interruption, to think about it more. To think about interruption without a story in my head, say a story of Erica. So I read and I try not to think of Erica, but I cannot because Erica has started my wonderings about interruptions in a story of self. Reading poetry by Anne Carson I am reminded of the story of Lazarus. For Lazarus there is an interruption in his story of death and he is returned to the living in a tired halting manner as he stumbles out of his tomb into a story of living. Anne Carson (2000) writes,

> *Lazarus*!
> A froth of fire is upon his mind.
> It crawls to the back of his tongue,
> struggles a bit,
> cracking the shell
> and pushes out a bluish cry that passes at once to the soul.
> *Martha*!
>
> he cries, making a little scalded place

> on the billows of tomb that lap our faces as we watch.
> We know the difference now
> (life or death).
> For an instant it parts our hearts.
> Someone take the linen napkin off his face.
> says the director quietly. (pp. 94–95)

A profound shift not only in the story Lazarus had ceased to live, but also in the story his community was living. I use this story to interrupt the reading of this piece. It is intentional, and I am aware, not without a rupture in the narrative coherence of this piece of writing. I am intentional in this because when a story of self is interrupted we pay more attention to that story. This is a statement about heightened attention. In a break in a story the shell of understanding is cracked and the cloth that obscures our vision or understanding must be attended to because we are no longer caught in the original plotline. As Carson suggests we know the difference now between the two plots. We knew the first plot, but in the interruption we see it for the first time as something that can be altered and therefore understood in paradox, in the light of the new story. Note too the presence of the observer in the poem, the director telling someone to remove the shroud. In Erica's interrupted story both Lian and I observed her. It is interesting to consider what her friends were observing as this shift occurred.

Interrupted stories arise from our understanding of the original story placed alongside the new story. In the tension we experience between the two we must attend or choose not to attend, but in that moment we attend never-the-less. Travis experiences this break in his story with Lian. Erica experiences it with her peers and Lian. Cheyenne experiences it as she moves to a new school. Catrina experiences it as she plays with the idea of who she is in the story of the classroom. When these interruptions appear they make us attend to our stories of self in school. During my year as a researcher I was challenged to attend to my story of self, and, in the place as guest in another teacher's classroom, I was challenged to attend to the interruption of my story as a teacher.

A new story to live by

I entered Lian's room with the idea of doing research with her and her children. I knew, as a narrative inquirer, that I would live a relational story with Lian and the children. However, I wanted this story to be based on my role as a researcher and not as a teacher. For the most part I was able to stay out of the role of teacher. There were, however, times throughout the year when I did teach. Sometimes this occurred because I volunteered, and in other moments because I was asked. There is a difference here because when I volunteered I was teaching while Lian was in the room and ultimately responsible for the children. In other moments, however, I was alone with the children and highly conscious of the conflicting stories I was being asked to live. When it was just the children and me the order of the classroom was interrupted. I became the person responsible and my fear was that I would somehow damage my relationship with the children when I had to be the voice of authority. To avoid this I was far more permissive of behaviour than I would have been in my own classroom and I am sure than Lian would have been. Rather I used quiet techniques for keeping a lid on the classroom and moved about talking to children and interrupting their story of not working.

During the times when I was a guest teacher, and this occurred twice in an art setting, my field notes are almost nonexistent. This is because when I was teaching I was unable to pay attention in the same manner as when my main role was that of researcher. I loved the moments when I was working with the whole class in this way, but my attention at these times was consumed with "are they understanding?", "how can I help them?", and "are they completing the task?" This form of attention interrupted my story of being a researcher in the class. This interruption served the purpose of drawing my attention to what I wanted to do in the class and to who I wanted to be. Being interrupted in this manner, being removed from the story I was trying to live as a researcher in a classroom rather than as teacher, I became more aware of my story as researcher. This interruption made me pay more attention to my story of experience. As director of my story I "removed the linen napkin from my face" and changed my role.

In a vulnerable place

When an interruption occurs in our stories to live by, we become more aware of who we are, not only in the story we are telling, but in the story others experience of us. As a researcher and not a teacher I felt vulnerable in trying to understand what it meant to be a researcher and when I was teaching the class, I felt vulnerable in my story of being in relationship with the children. Erica felt vulnerable in her relationships with her peers and therefore decided to alter her relationship with Lian, or in a narrative manner, shift her story to live by in relation to Lian. This was also the experience of Travis. In the moment when Lian interrupted his story to live by in school he became vulnerable in his understanding of the story he was living in Lian's classroom and the larger school landscape.

Being vulnerable shifts us into a place of liminality (Lundberg, 2000) where we must attend to the creation of a new story whether that story is transitory as in the case of Travis, or more permanent as in the stories of Erica or Cheyenne. Liminality according to Heilbrun (1999) is "the condition of moving from one state to another under conditions which are, by definition, unstable" (p. 35). In her citing of Driver, she writes

> his thesis is that ritual, which encourages the condition of liminality, is necessary to a living and changing society or religion. As he remarks, 'In their liminality, rituals exist outside of many of the rules and expectations society normally imposes on behavior' (p. 164). (p. 35)

I would add that liminality is also a part of a living story, of Erica or Travis or my lived story. Is it possible to live a life without entering places of liminality? Can a child arrive at the end of schooling without ever having stood at the threshold of understanding? During my year with the class and the children with whom I worked more closely and with Lian, I saw many moments that could be described as liminal. Indeed, as I moved from researcher to teacher I found myself in a liminal state as I tried to negotiate relationships and personal understanding of what it meant to my story of self in the classroom.

Liminality is therefore a part of the process that we may experience when we move outside our story of school or the stories others have of us in school. Shifting out of my plotline of researcher into a would be responsible teacher placed me in a liminal state, and had I been observed I might have been storied as not acting as a teacher, but as an individual standing outside of the plotline of teacher. Erica stepped out of her plotline of girl who would be like the teacher, a plotline that made her feel safe in the classroom. She did this in order to enter into the plotline of her friends and in that place was someone who was not so like the teacher and for a time she existed in a liminal state until the new story took hold. Then she became a more accepted member of her friendship group at school.

We also enter a liminal state when others shift us out of our plotlines in moments when we have no control. Erica was in control of her shift in her story to live by in school, she could have chosen to stay in the original plotline, but she did not. I could have decided that I did not want to be the teacher and said no, although I was constrained by my relationship with Lian to agree to this shift. Travis, however, found himself in a liminal state when the plotline shifted around him. Lian was in charge of this story shift and Travis' reaction was to remove himself from the location of this story in order to be in control of his own story again. For him, this liminal state not of his own making made him less in control of his story as distinct to Erica and me.

When children are shifted out of their story to live by in school and they enter the unstable place of liminality they use whatever device happens to suit them in their desire to remain in control of their story. In the case of Travis he was going to move schools.

For Cheyenne, in order to make sense of how to be in a broken relationship with the teacher at her previous school she went to her family. There is a moment on the playground when Travis shifted Dylan out of his story of the cool boy into the boy who looked like he had breasts because of the way his sweatshirt sat on his body. Dylan asserted himself in order to show that he cannot be made fun of in this manner. In this moment, a liminal moment outside of his usual story, Dylan exerted force to punish Travis for this indiscretion and re-establish a more comfortable story. When I talked to Travis about it later he was embarrassed to share this story because of what he had said about Dylan. He admitted to trying to be funny and when it backfired he was scared of the fall out with Dylan. Travis entered a liminal space in his joking about Dylan and when this attempt backfired in the face of Dylan's anger, Travis retreated to a safer plotline and admitted he wished he had never said it. When I talked to Dylan about it he agreed with me when I suggested, given his knowledge of Travis, that Travis probably wished he had never said it. Dylan can see the logic in this because he is familiar with the typical story Travis lives by in school and being disrespectful of others is not part of this story.

In these examples of interrupted stories it is clear to me that an interruption in a story placed the children in a liminal space, an unstable space. They must act in some manner to stabilise themselves and move out of this liminal state. They did this regardless of whether they chose to shift or the shift was made for them. Being in a liminal state is to be vulnerable and for the children I worked with, and in my own story, this place of vulnerability was one to move beyond.

It is important to note too that it is quite possible to shift one's story to live by and not experience a liminal moment. This occurs when one finds oneself with an altered story to live by and little or no recollection of when the shift occurred. This would then suggest that no interruption had taken place or that it was so small an interruption as not to be noticed. Therefore every shift in a story to live by does not indicate an interruption, vulnerability, or liminality. These shifts, however, when experienced within a nested relationship are mediated by the relationship.

Interruptions and nested knowledge

Lyons (1990) writes, "students and teachers come together in a special relationship in learning, having a clear epistemological basis" (p. 173). The teacher and student relationship is based on the exchange of knowledge and therefore on epistemological matters. As I wrote earlier, this inquiry is not about the epistemologies held by Lian and the children. Rather as a narrative inquirer I consider that epistemology might be understood as an individual's story to live by, the narrative structure (Carr, 1986) by which we make sense of the world, or in relation to epistemology, the ways we know. Teachers and children come together and corresponding shifts occur in their stories to live by. Relationship shapes this coming together and is deepened by nested knowing. Knowers knowing knowers, as nested knowledge might be described, is about developing an understanding of individuals' stories to live by as well as shaping epistemologies. This is not a one-way relationship shaped by the hierarchical structure of a classroom with the teacher knowing the most and shaping all the child knows. Rather, it is a dynamic knowing where knowers are enmeshed within a community of relationships shaped by the story of school in its complexity.

An interruption in a story to live by may draw attention to the individual's story and cause shifts to occur in the way we know. This occurred for all the children in the inquiry in multiple ways and highlights the relationship between focal and subsidiary awareness (Polanyi, 1962) and impinges on our tacit knowledge of the story of self in school. Interruptions in stories to live by in school shift focal and subsidiary awareness and therefore alter the ways we know within nested relationships. This was evident in Travis' shift in his relationship with Lian. A subsidiary part of Travis' story of school was his knowledge that he would change schools at the end of the year. However, when confronted by Lian about his work habits he wanted to change schools immediately. The idea of creating a new story to live by in a different school became the point of his focal knowledge of being in school as he tried to understand how to be in this new knowledge of being in relationship with Lian. Lian was acutely aware of what she was doing when she confronted Travis on his schoolwork. When I arrived that day she told me I might want to speak with Travis because of his reaction. Lian was aware of the nested quality of her relationship with Travis. Other examples of this are found throughout the inquiry. There were moments when she told me things that were direct examples of nested knowledge. Confrontations with Dylan were often shaped by her nested knowledge. She was able to talk about her knowledge of Dylan in these situations and in listening to her it was evident that her knowledge of self was also shaped by the ways Dylan knew her.

Nested knowledge and vulnerability

Due to the dynamic quality of nested knowledge and the interruptions that shape it the potential for vulnerability is always present. This was evident in the experience of Dylan and Lian. Dylan's story to live by in school was not always smooth, without tensions. He was highly aware of relationships in his story to live by in school. He had a certain ability to challenge the story of others at school and was sometimes storied as a boy in conflict with the story of school. Lian was aware of this part of Dylan's story and of his influence on others. At one point in the year she suggested to Carson's mother that Dylan might not always be a good influence on him. She did not name Dylan in this conversation, but Carson's mother and Lian tacitly understood about whom she was speaking. When Carson's mother relayed this information to Carson she named Dylan. Carson then conveyed this information to Dylan and there was a resulting rupture, or interruption, in Dylan and Lian's story to live by in school.

This rupture can be understood in the terms of loving and arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987). Lugones writes,

> To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as a products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them — fail to love them —in this particular deep way. (p. 4)

This rupture for Dylan can be understood as a failure of loving perception. It caused a profound shift in his relationship with Lian, one that he expressed by refusing to talk with her for a period of time. In conversation with Lian, she was well aware of what she had done and her reaction to it was mixed. She cared for Dylan and was not happy with the outcome of her conversation with Carson's mother, although she expressed dismay with Carson's mother for sharing her thoughts about Carson and Dylan's relationship.

This idea of loving and arrogant perception is complex when understood within a nested relationship. While it is clear that Lian's conversation with Carson's mother is an example of arrogant perception in that she failed to identify with Dylan, Lian also can be seen to have a loving perception of Dylan when she realized the impact of her conversation on him. The movement between arrogant and loving perception is filled with tensions. I experience these tensions as I try to understand what I perceive as a break down in loving perception on the part of Lian. Commenting on this about Lian puts me in this place of tension. In deciding to understand Lian as using an arrogant perception, do I, too, fall into a place of arrogant perception? Lian's conversation with the mother came out of a place of concern for the ways she saw the boys behaving, but in her use of Dylan as the instigator she perceives him with arrogance in not seeking to understand in relationship with him. This way of thinking about interruptions of stories to live by in nested relationships is complex. Another example of this is the story of Catrina and Leo and the convenience store. Both Lian and I perceived Catrina with arrogant perception when it came to the stories she told of her experience in the world. Rather than using loving perception and world travelling, the ability to enter into the 'world' of another (Lugones, 1987) we missed the opportunity to understand Catrina's stories to live by regarding Leo and the convenience store and, in doing so, interrupted her story to live by based on a reliance on our perceived knowledge in our nested knowledge with her. In this way of understanding nested knowledge it can be seen in the ways it interrupts stories to live by in multiple ways. As I think about myself as a teacher I think about the importance of world travel and loving perception as ways of attending to and learning from the stories of children. I am reminded of the tensions I have experienced in my perceptions and understandings of the children with whom I have worked. Standing alongside Lian has helped me attend to and learn from the children. I wonder how teachers learn how to do this in their classrooms? How do we learn to be vulnerable? I wonder where the spaces are for teachers to be able to wonder about these ideas of relationship.

Narrative knowledge and nested knowledge

Our narrative knowledge of self, our stories to live by, are directly influenced in school by the nested knowledge that is a central piece of a community of learners. This narrative identity in school is shaped by continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938) and is contingent on the external force of the classroom community which can be viewed as a site of nested knowledge.

Lian's knowledge of Catrina is shaped by the continuity of their relationship and the interaction of situation and social forces in both of their stories to live by in school. For Lian the continuity of her relationship with Catrina shapes how she understands the moment in the class when Catrina joins the girls dancing to Catrina's CD at the front of the class. For Catrina, as we saw in the narrative account, this is a moment of relationship and interaction with the other girls in the class. For Lian, it is a moment when Catrina attempted to enter into the relational life of the girls and failed. The tensions in these two stories relies on the narrative knowledge Lian holds regarding Catrina and her nested knowledge of Catrina and the other girls in the class and Catrina's description of the moment. Polanyi (1962), although not discussing nested knowledge, offers a way to understand it when he writes,

> For if we agree with that which the other person claims to know and with the grounds on which he relies for this knowledge, the critical examination of this knowledge will become a critical reflection on our own knowledge. (p. 373).

In the moment framed by the girls in class dancing to the CD, Catrina's narrative knowledge of self is not impacted by Lian's story because this knowledge is not shared. However, when Lian shares this information with me I use her story to understand Catrina's experience highlighting the nested nature of my relationship with both Lian and Catrina. When I discussed the moment with Catrina, I doubted the truth of her perception. I arrogantly perceived Catrina and ascertained from Lian what she saw as happening. Lian's story confirmed my suspicions about the nature of Catrina's version of the moment. It is only later, upon reflection, that I see how I privileged Lian's story over Catrina, and how my nested knowledge of Catrina is shaped by my nested knowledge with Lian.

Privileging stories of others in a situated relationship

Another example of this notion of privilege is in my response to the story Jeanette, the school principal, tells about Catrina when I told her who among the children I wanted to work with during the inquiry. A component of my relationship with Jeanette is my respect for the relational quality she endeavours to bring to her work with her school community. In our discussion of Catrina she used the word "weird" to describe her. She qualified the word by inferring it connotes for her a certain element of respect, it also suggests a story to live by outside of an acceptable story to live by within a culture. It is interesting to think about how Catrina might be shaped by this story of her on the landscape of school. Certainly it is a story that followed her in her life at school. Catrina's previous teacher in Grades 3/4 at one point intervened in Catrina's friendship with a Grade 4 girl suggesting that Catrina was not a good influence on the younger girl because of her weirdness.

Both of these stories suggest the privilege of telling stories about others. Jeanette's story of Catrina is an attempt to assist me in understanding Catrina and is told with care for Catrina's story to live by and not a little worry about what that story to live by means in Catrina's narrative knowledge of self. What these two stories indicate is a larger story of Catrina on the school landscape and a story therefore used to shape the nested knowledge of others in relationship with Catrina. If narrative structure (Carr, 1986) is the "organizing principle not only of experience and actions but of the self who experiences and acts" (p. 73), then these stories of Catrina not only shape her experiences in relationship, but subsequently shape her understanding of self.

Another version of the shaping structure of narrative is the story of Travis on the school landscape. Travis is a boy who is seen as someone in need of care by many of the adults who interact with him. He is boy who has a smooth story of school, but a less smooth story of life outside of school, although this is not a story he ever told to me.

However, he does understand school through the narrative structure of being someone cared about by many adults. Lian is complicit in this story by her own admission and wondered later in the year if working with him again was a good idea given what she began to see as his current needs in school. Indeed, when Lian began to shift her story of caring for Travis, he responded by wanting to leave the school. For Lian this shift was about caring in a different way; for Travis it was a break in his narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) and in his nested knowledge of Lian. For Lian it was also a shift in her nested knowledge of Travis and she wondered what it would do to the narrative coherence of their stories to live by in relationship in school. The element of privilege in this story lay in the arrogant perception both Lian and I maintained that this shift was beneficial for Travis.

The use of fictions to live by

Fictional accounts became something I found myself attending to as this inquiry progressed. Catrina drew my attention to this more acutely than any of the other participants in the inquiry. What I have to consider when thinking about her use of fictionalisation of experience is my arrogant perception. Understanding fictionalisation in Catrina's story to live by can be seen as privileging one version of reality over another, namely Lian's and mine. It privileges one over another in nested knowledge and can lead to an interruption in relationship and narrative coherence. Therefore, it is timely to think more about the role of fictionalisation in an individual's story to live by. Let me begin with myself.

I admit to experiencing personal tension in my use of fiction as a way to explain and capture experience. When I began this inquiry I wrote the story of Pirates' Hill to begin to understand my interest in the lives of children in school. It is a story of my childhood and therefore a recollection of a moment in a day of a boy in Grade 1. I retold it relying on memory and my ability as a writer to capture it in words. Even as I write these words I am taken back to that day on the hill behind my elementary school. I do not think of it as a fiction because it is my memory, but it has elements of fiction in it. It contains characters, plot, tensions, climax, and setting. It is not based on any recorded information and relies wholly on my ability to recall and shape that moment in this current context of my life.

Then, throughout this dissertation, I have used wholly fictional accounts to understand my experience. These would be the Sloughboy stories that thread their way through the more academic style of writing that is the bulk of this work. These fictional stories are shaped by the life of this inquiry. They found their inspiration in the field texts generated in the work with the participants in the inquiry and allowed me to access the inner life of the inquiry and the relationships that formed as a result of this work. When I read the Sloughboy pieces to the participants they were captured by how I had represented our relationships. The responses of the children, parents, Lian and my research partners were supportive and encouraging. As challenging as it might be to understand that empiricism supported these fictions, it is true. What then am I saying about fictions within a nested relationship?

I begin this section with this reflection on the use of fiction to understand and share my experience as a way of thinking about the role of fiction in the lives of individuals. In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley (1997) uses the fiction of Leo Lionni to frame her understanding of her final year as a Kindergarten teacher and her relationship with a girl in her class, Reeny. I used my own fictions in this inquiry and Paley used the fiction of Lionni to frame and develop an understanding of her experience with her last Kindergarten class. What then of the people who tell fictions of their lives or rather, use fiction as a way to speak about their lives? Autobiography is a genre where fiction plays an increasing role in capturing a life (Eakin, 1985) and is considered to be a component in the use of memory to construct the story of one's life. Eakin explains,

> … fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived and of any art devoted to the presentation of that life … [Writers of autobiography] no longer believe that autobiography can offer a faithful and unmediated reconstruction of a historically verifiable past; instead, it expresses the play of the autobiographical act itself, in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness. (p. 5)

In this inquiry Catrina could be storied as the individual who created numerous fictions to explain her experience. She told stories of ghosts in the school, escaped tarantulas, and witches in her house. These, for me, are the most startling examples of fictions, of stories without a foundation in my reality. However, what I have come to understand is the difference between fiction and fantasy. They are not the same thing and as Eakin suggests, the "materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness." What follows is an example of this play of memory and imagination.

At one time in the year Catrina told me the story of how the school sat on the original site for a family farmhouse. She proceeded to then tell me about the mother who had been killed in the farmhouse.

> Catrina: Yeah and somebody got murdered in it and then room 3 was like a bedroom I think. And somebody got
>
> Shaun: So you think the school was their house.
>
> Catrina: Yeah well like before the school was even built.
>
> Shaun: Oh so
>
> Catrina: Like there was a house here.
>
> Shaun: Oh, OK and how do you know somebody was murdered in it?
>
> Catrina: Because of history books.
>
> Shaun: What history books?
>
> Catrina: There's history books in the public library about this neighbourhood …
>
> (taped conversation, November 18, 2002)

I was never able to ascertain if there was indeed a book in the public library about the history of the area of city in which the school was located. However, the school was situated on the site of a farm that had existed prior to the development of the neighbourhood. As well, at the entrance to the school was a picture of mother, a woman who had been very involved in the school, who had been murdered by intruders to her home. Not the mother of a distant farmhouse, but a mother of the present. Catrina, it can be surmised, had pieced these two stories together to come up with a story of the school. Based on facts, its final shape however was a fiction, but one that helped her understand something of the history of the school. I do not know why Catrina told these stories. I did try to find out, but she was steadfast in sticking to them as non-fiction. I can only suggest that they supported her story to live by, that they somehow helped her make sense of experience.

Nested knowledge and fictions of experience

Catrina also told stories of bullying at school. This was a recurring story for her regardless of the school she was attending. I am not suggesting, given the heading of this section, that these stories of bullying were fictionalised accounts of experience. However, given the context of school Catrina finds herself in, it is not difficult to align the presence of ghosts, ghosts who drip water and flicker lights, ghosts who make things move in outside buildings with the demons who threatened her at school. The story of the flickering lights was one of the first stories Catrina told me. She told it to me after walking through the first classroom she had been in before a teacher had been surplussed and she had been moved to Lian's room. Considering this, it is imaginable to think of her walking through that classroom on our way to the room we used for the conversations encountering the ghosts of her experiences there before her relocation.

As my year with the children progressed and I entered into deeper relationships with them, my understanding of the role of fiction in their lives shifted. I was more willing to consider alternative tellings to represent their experiences. Indeed, I was playing with this idea of representation myself in the Sloughboy stories. Interested in why children are so willing to tell stories in response to another's experience, I began to ask them why children often respond with a story when asked if they have any questions. This is particularly evident when they have been listening to a presentation and asked at the end of it if they have any questions. Inevitably many respond with their own story of experience. I posed this question to Leo and he responded with his story of the night walk and his meeting with bear and the wolves.

Leo told me this story after I had read him my first Sloughboy story based on our experiences. I suggest that my sharing influenced his willingness to use this story, a story outside of typical stories of experience based on the nested relationship we maintained. He knew me as a knower who was willing to think about experience in different ways. However, at the end of his telling I ask him if it was true or a dream. Even now, a year after Leo shared that story, I feel the tension in my stomach that signals the memory of the shame I felt in not honouring his story and his kind response as he helped me understand without giving into what I suggested by asking him the question. In that moment as a knower, Leo helped shape my knowing, highlighting the reciprocal knowing in a situated relationship.

In a less favourable moment Lian and I presumed to understand the story of Catrina, Leo, and the convenience store as a fiction created by Catrina. Only later, by talking to Catrina and Leo, did I find out that her story was indeed based on a history of fact. Lian and I used our nested knowledge of Catrina and her use of fiction to judge her less favourably, rather than using loving perception and world travel (Lugones, 1987) to arrive at an understanding.

Fictionalised stories to live by or imaginative stories of experience?

Eakin (1985) highlights the role of imagination in understanding experience. For him it is the imaginative act coupled with memory that helps us understand our histories. When we step away from imagination and rely only on our memories what do we fall back on to provide us with ways to shape the materials of our history? We are not repositories of an encompassing understanding of the totality of experience. Indeed, I do not think such a thing can be said to exist—like numbers, like the stories of all the people of the world such a things spirals out into the infinite, beyond comprehension.

Instead we rely on the verisimilitude of experience, which can be shaped within relationship. It can also be threatened by relationship, both of which occurred within the narratives of the children in the inquiry. Can fictionalised stories to live by be understood more easily as imagined stories to live by? Perhaps the idea of imagined versus fictionalised is less threatening to a culture, a culture of learners, for example. Stephen Banks (Banks & Banks, 1998) suggests,

> the opposite of fact isn't fiction but something like error. The opposite of fiction isn't truth but something like objectivity or actuality … no text is free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror to the actual. (p. 13)

Perhaps another word for self-conscious constructions is imagination. Not the imagination of the fantastical, but rather the imagination of the experience, the imagination that promotes understanding. Like the imaginative act Catrina undertook to understand the history of her school. Or Leo telling me the story of his late night walk, a story he prefaced with, "Don't tell my parents." Consider the self-conscious construction of Erica shifting her story to live by in the classroom community or Cheyenne relying on the knowledge that her sisters would help her make sense of the teacher who made no space for the sound of Cheyenne's voice. Or the way Travis understands the big stories in his head as a part of his history, big stories that push aside other stories, but in some imaginative construction of coherence he makes space for new stories of experience. "The stories *of* our days and the stories *in* our days," writes Lyle (2000), "are joined in the autobiography we all make and remake, as long as we live, which we never complete, though we all know how it is going to end" (p. 54).

Our stories to live by are shaped by the nested relationships we maintain in our lives. In the context of school these relationships occur with the individuals and groups that populate the landscape of school. They are aided or confounded by the nested knowing we experience with others who may or may not make a space for our imagined or self-conscious constructions. Imagination plays a role in the foundations of nested knowing and enables us in the relational (Greene, 1995) work of understanding the experience of others. Greene explains this role of imagination

> as the means through which we can assemble a coherent world … imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called "other" over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner

> through strangers' eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. (p. 3)

Perhaps imagination is better suited to explain the constructed stories of others or perhaps it is better to stay with the tensions engendered by the use of fiction. Regardless of the choice it is the context and relationship that shape the story and the hearing.

Shifting stories to live by in situated relationships

Bruner (2002) posed the question, "Don't we, too, have to tell the event in order to find out whether, after all, 'this is the kind of person I really mean to be'" (pp. 73–74)? If we are not content with the tension in this telling can there be a corresponding shift in our story to live by? We tell the event to ourselves and/or to others. Events in a nested relationship can conspire to instigate this telling or open us up to a new telling of who we are in our story to live by. This telling does not need to be construed as negative, but rather as the possible in the construction of identity.

Catrina shaped my understanding about this when Lian and I attempted to shape her knowledge of herself through the text of *Awake and Dreaming* (Pearson, 1996). Catrina, however, was not open to this version of how she might understand self. It was our thought that Pearson would scaffold a way of understanding that might suggest to Catrina a way of understanding the role of fictionalisation in her life. This was not to be. Catrina was not to be shifted in her understanding of her story to live by; she did not adopt the words of Pearson to describe her way of being in the world. She did like the book indicating that she thought it was "excellent." However, the story that captured her attention was *Stargirl* (Spinelli, 2000). The story of Stargirl is one of a girl who entered school with a story in conflict with scripted ways of behaviour. Before Stargirl's story to live by is disastrously interrupted, she shifts the perception of a number of students while maintaining her individuality. When I asked Catrina if the character of Stargirl reminded her of herself she did not answer my question. It is interesting however that she chose to discuss *Stargirl* when we were talking about *Awake and Dreaming*. In the nested knowledge that arose from this place, Lian and I had to shift our stories to live by that shaped our understanding of Catrina.

In the summer Lian and I talked about our experiences of the year. At one point in the conversation we discussed Catrina's responses to literature. Catrina had such an astute understanding and way of explaining situations when talking to us that we assumed she would bring this to her work of describing literature. She did not. Often her responses to books were terse and undeveloped. Both Lian and I had imagined a much stronger response by Catrina to *Awake and Dreaming*. However, Catrina thwarted us in what we imagined would be the way the book would speak to her about the construction of reality. Upon reflection it was arrogance on our part when we assumed what Catrina would think in response to the story.

> Shaun: And you know she, you said that Catrina said to you that *Stargirl* was the greatest book she'd ever read.
>
> Lian: Yeah.

Shaun: That's all she said about it right? Um she didn't say anything else about the dynamic or anything?

Lian: No.

Shaun: So why do you think Catrina never gave us the responses we expected her to give us?

Lian: Probably, well why, why, my I don't know but …

Shaun: OK.

Lian: Probably because she doesn't want to. You know there may be that part that she just doesn't want to go there with.

Shaun: Right.

Lian: You know she, she makes everything up. She's like that *Awake and Dreaming* book was like, it hit me so hard with her. She, her reality is to make things better than what they are. Do you know what I mean? Like …

Shaun: Yeah.

Lian: And why would she go there? She doesn't go there?

Shaun: No she doesn't go there. (taped conversation, July 24, 2003)

I am happy in retrospect that it was Lian and I who had to make the shift in this nested relationship and that Catrina was able to maintain her story to live by.

Another example of shifting stories to live by in a nested relationship is embedded within the first recorded conversation of Leo and me. In this moment, as I worked at establishing a new relationship with Leo within the inquiry, I discovered the direction the conversation I was orchestrating was causing distress for Leo. My direct questions about school were not ones Leo was comfortable discussing. Attending to him in a nested way I shifted the conversation to discussing his life outside of school. In this shift Leo began to talk, became less distressed, and taught me many things about the ways he was shaped through interactions with his family. A shift occurred for both of us which, in the narrative account of Leo I named, *Leo teaches me manners.*

Shifting stories to live by were a constant in the classroom. They occurred in small and large ways throughout the year. The shifts in stories to live by in the class were shaped by new information, conflict, and forces external to the classroom to name but a few ways shifts were prompted. I recall the day Lian announced she would not be returning to the school in the fall. There were mixed reactions, but all of the students looked shocked. When I talked to some of them they had mixed ways of making sense of this new story to live by. Children in Grade 6, all of whom would be attending a different school the following year, made sense of it by saying they were leaving too. Travis, who knew he was moving schools, dealt with it by knowing he was changing anyway. Catrina however, laid her head on her desk, overwhelmed by this shift in her story to live by in school. Darren who had entered the class in the fall with feelings of being overwhelmed, who had shifted his story during the year to one of making sense of his place in the class also lowered his head to his desk. For Darren, not only was he being abandoned by Lian, but Kim, the boy Lian had paired with Darren to help him make sense in the class at the beginning of the year, was moving on to Grade 7 and a new school. No one was able to resist this shift in his or her stories to live by. There was no way Lian could be made to stay.

Although Lian's departure was a shift without plotlines of resistance, resistance was a part of the nested relationships Lian and I maintained throughout the year with the children. Resistance was evident in Catrina's reaction to the books and Dylan's reaction to Lian's story of whom Carson should play with during the year. Although these can be seen as resistance to shifts, they, in themselves, are shifts in stories to live by in school. The choice to resist implies a shift in itself. Resisting or not made for a shift in a story to live by and a way to know the other. The nested knowledge of people in schools is complex and layered. It is shaped by knowledge, relationships, space and multiple experiences. Although only one kind of knowledge, it is shaped by its interaction with many kinds of knowledge.

Stories of and stories in

All of the stories of the people in this inquiry were lived out, as I wrote earlier, in one classroom, in one school, in one western Canadian city, in just over one year. Their stories to live by were shaped by a multitude of experiences. My understanding of them was, and is, shaped by a multitude of experiences. A boy climbs a hill and comes down to meet angry teachers. A man enters a school in the hopes of finding research participants with whom to live in relationship over a year. I made friends, built relationships, entered into nested relationships and was shifted in my story to live by. I had the opportunity to move in and out of the stories of their days and the stories in their days.

A boy went up a hill behind a school and 33 years later he came down. On the street where he lives now rabbits abound, but the threat of rabies is a distant memory of one summer and fall. The boundaries of the boy's life changed and the relationships have as well. His travelling companions are varied and diverse. They are no longer only a cohort of fellow first graders, although he still travels with such worthy companions. Now he wonders about treasure in different places, although he does indeed keep his eyes open on large hills for the possibility of the buried plunder of pirates. Going up the hill the boy was a researcher, coming down he still is. In Gail Haley's (1988) book, *A Story* , *A Story*, she writes, "The African storyteller begins: 'We do not really mean, we do not really mean that what we are about to say is true. A story, a story; let it come, let it go'" (p. 1).

The slow story of school

Where has Sloughboy been in these final pages on this journey of understanding? Beyond a few oblique references to his presence as the ghost of fictional understanding in the discourse of explanation he has been largely absent. He has been my silent companion in these final pages, waiting patiently on the margins of my imagination to be welcomed back into the text *see him there smiling in his slough?* If you can see him then he has come to exist on the margins of your imagination too. If that is true then as a fictional device he has been successful. Do you wonder at so callous a rendering of his presence in my writing life? It is not flippantly done, indeed he has been such a presence in the writing, but as you may have come to know, he is also much more. Perhaps, in the words of others, he might be best explained as my muse, but if I am to use the words that have shaped this experience he has been my companion in a nested knowledge of experience. This is not to suggest some fracture in my identity. Sloughboy exists, at least in my mind, entirely constructed by his experience.

I wondered what would happen to this undomesticated boy when I took him to school. Do all parents wonder what will become of their offspring when they send them out into the world? Sloughboy is best described by this word, offspring. He is no child of mine. He sprung out of a story of experience. The experience of a boy defying his mother who not only went into the slough, but slid into the water and were I to have believed my mother completely, the water where I could have drowned. Thankfully I was able to challenge the nested relationship I enjoyed with my mother in order to have the experience that engendered the creation of this boy in my life.

Where is his final story then in this collection of thoughts and stories? He stands at the border of the slough and the school pondering the slow story of the slough. He understands some of it through the slow story of the birch and the sacred story of the slough. The sacred story of the slough, unexplainable, unwordable he now knows from looking over my shoulder as I read the words of Stephen Crites (1971). It is not beyond the realm of understanding he whispers to me. Even though he has no words for the sacred story of the slough just as I have none for the sacred story of school, still we know some things about both of them. However, they will not be written down, for as you know, they cannot.

Rather the understanding of these sacred stories exist in the experiences of the boy and his companions. His companions of the slough—Cravenbeast, the grass, oldest living life, and the story stick—and his new companions—One-who-stands-among, Certain-girl-shifting, Boy-who-would-be-seen, Ghost-girl-who-knows, and Ravineboy. The understanding also exists in me, companion of them all. I look for them in the spaces between the words and lines I made in this writing. Just as paper bounds these words, the sacred story of places bounds our mundane stories of experience.

What then is the slow story of school? I have been trying to hear it. I have tried to slow myself to the speed of its telling, but I have not been successful. It exists beyond my ability to tell. Perhaps, because it is 'heard' in so many multiple ways governed by the mundane stories or as Travis tells me, the big stories we carry in our bodies, it could never be explained so as to make sense to all of us. To enter into the slowness of this story, its unfolding creation of experience, would be to step out of the mundane stories we live. Imagine standing in the place of such slowness, such stilled unfolding and observing the mundane stories of people rushing by. Where would you rather stand? I would rather be in the current of experience and let the slow story of school tug at my imagination. I step into the slough and sit on Sloughboy's rock as I watch them all play the seeking game.

Coyote comes up and sits beside me and we watch together. There they all are and we can see Lian walking toward us through the grass. She does not play with them but joins the wild dog and me at the rock. It is dusk. Do you recall dusk is the *best time to play the seeking game? See how twitchy they are as they seek and hide at the same time. They all have a knowing that allows them to play this game together, but if you look closely, remember it is getting dark, you can see they play the game in their own way.*

Sloughboy, tricky wild boy, has taken to the murky water, knowing it is a good place to hide. Ghost-girl-who-knows has slipped to the edge of the slough, just beyond the easy reach of this group, but not gone. Boy-who-would-be-seen has woven the grass into a screen through which he peers and chuckles to himself ... his chuckle dances across the slough. Certain-girl-shifting does what she does best, she constructs herself by using the shadows to dance in and out of sight and One-who-stands-among imagines where her sisters would hide and crouches in the gathering of willow near Sloughboy's pool. And Ravineboy? At this moment he is the seeker. He is looking for the others. He moves through the slough Coyote-like, twitchy in his hiding/seeking.

The light fades from the sky. The slough darkens. Strain to see through the failing light. They are playing there still.

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